

# IMAGINATION

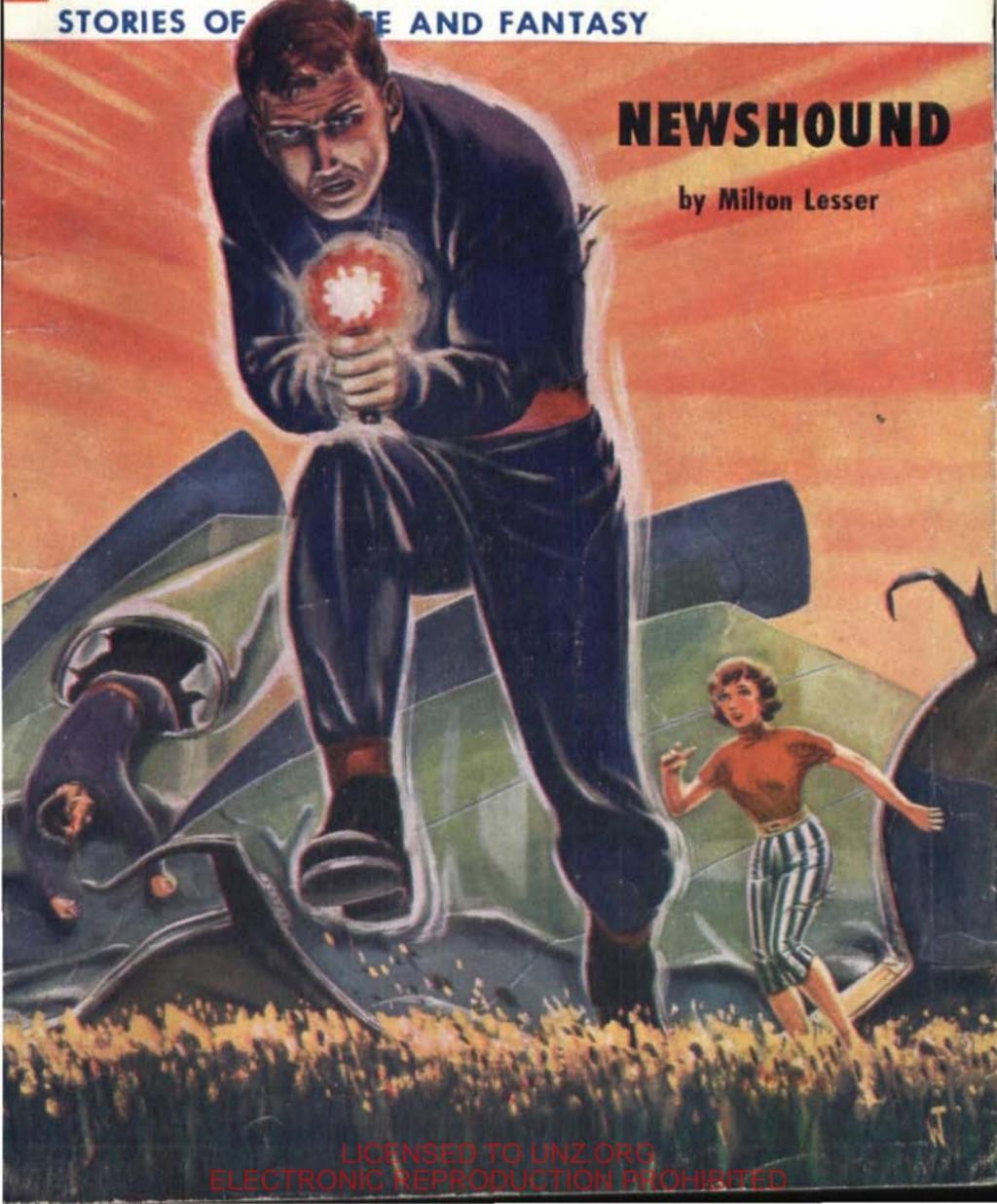
STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

JULY, 1955

35¢

## NEWSHOUND

by Milton Lesser



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# I

# Introducing the



# A U T H O R



*Irving Cox, Jr.*



BORN in Philadelphia, I spent the early years of my life in Quaker schools, absorbing a vigorous, classical education. The economic disaster of 1929 sent my family moving restlessly from one part of the nation to another. I attended a great many public schools, some very good and some disgracefully mediocre. We lived for brief intervals in the South, the Middle West and the Far West—many of the romantic place-names that spell out America. I knew as schoolboys the kids who grow up to fill the bitter pages of our disillusioned realists.

Ours, granted, was no easy growing up time, yet the problems which bedeviled our generation were small beside the tensions which the

children of today must face. When I compare the two periods, I marvel not that we have so many neurotic breakdowns but that so many of us have found real stability.

I went to college for two years in Indiana, and completed my B. A. at Whittier College, in California. I spent the war years in the transportation business, handling primarily explosives for the Pacific War. After V-J day I returned to Whittier College for a M. A. and a teaching credential.

My major was English. In my graduate years, I concentrated on semantics. The science of language introduced me to the relatively new area where science and literature meet. That marriage of art and

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# The Editorial

**A**BOUT the time you read this a new science fiction film will make its debut throughout the country. The picture is *THIS ISLAND EARTH*, produced by *Universal*, adapted from the novel by Raymond F. Jones (*Shasta Publishers, Chicago*).

**W**E had an opportunity to attend an advance showing of the film the other evening. It was, everything considered, a delightful performance. Filmed in color, the picture opens with a shot of deep space, instilling from the onset a feeling of awesome grandeur. We were thus primed for great things to come, and by and large we were not disappointed. Half of the story takes place on Earth, leading up to—with excellent suspense—a trip to a distant planet of another stellar system. The plot includes an alien race—benevolently motivated but in dire peril in their own solar system where a war of survival against another race is taking place. These benevolent aliens need nuclear scientists desperately, so they come to Earth to "kidnap" the greatest of our scientists. They accomplish their goal with realistic dispatch—and of course one of the Earth scientists is a beautiful girl for the inevitable romantic development.

**T**RITE aspects of the story aside, and giving due allow-

ance for a few technical inaccuracies, the trip through space and the shots of an alien interplanetary war were impressive indeed. *Universal Pictures* apparently invested a good deal of time and money into construction of elaborate sets with close attention to photographic techniques to establish and maintain a feeling of realism. As far as we were concerned it was a job well done.

**I**T'S been quite a while since Hollywood produced a major science fiction film (except for the recent *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*) and we must admit we've been wondering why the long delay. But good things are worth waiting for. *THIS ISLAND EARTH* is one of them . . . wh



"This one didn't struggle at all!"

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*Benjamin Franklin*



*Isaac Newton*



*Francis Bacon*

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### SEND THIS COUPON

# NEWSHOUND

by

*Milton Lesser*

**The Fourth Estate was highly specialized  
in the 22nd Century; for example, a good newsman  
predicted coming events — and made them happen . . .**

**D**ARIUS McLeod leaned back comfortably and watched the mayor sweat.

His Honor popped a phenobarb tablet between his lips, tossing his head and gulping the pill down without water. His moist, nervous hands left their wet imprint on the desk top when he reached into his breast pocket and withdrew a clipping from the morning's *New York World*.

"You people elected me, McLeod," he said. "Now get me out of this mess."

"We merely supported your candidacy, Your Honor," McLeod said easily. "But let's see what you got there."

"It amounts to the same thing," the mayor pleaded. "For God's sake, give me a break."

McLeod shrugged and unfolded

the *World* clipping on his desk. "Naturally, the *World* will oppose your administration," he began. "Otherwise they'll never be able to live down the *Star-Times'* scoop on your election."

"That's precisely what I was saying. The way I understand it, you people will have to support your man. The *Star-Times* can't abandon me to the wolves, not now."

"I'm only a reporter," McLeod explained. "We report events, not make them."

"That's it. That's what I mean. The attitude. You're treating me like a child."

"You're acting like one."

"All I want is what's fair. Whatever you think is fair."

"Then let me read this thing."

The column clipped from the

**DEPUTY BOSS LENS**  
 In a fine family home Kickbacks  
**AFTER ROUTING PESKY SKUNKS**  
 Mrs. Helen Luther and her four children were back in their basement after being driven out by skunks.

**House Built to Last. 1,000 Years Won't**

BY JOSEPH EGERTHOF

It was difficult to get this marble tube and stone blocks for windows. It had been used for pipes, stonethrough, and so forth.

## Probe Into Mailbox Blast Brings Arrest Of 8 Students

Sheriff's posse broke up a teenage shaft ring at Palatine, Ill., on Feb. 27 arrested eight students of Palatine High School and recovered a dynamite bomb.

**FORGETS OWN FACE, SUFFERS MIND BLINDNESS**  
 Robert Deeks, Cal., 27, a man who forgot his own face, was described to the San Francisco and Los Angeles police departments today.

## Mayor Killed in Holdup



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*World* bore the cut-line COMING EVENTS. McLeod had always liked the *Star-Times'* LOOKING FORWARD better, although he had to admit that the *World's* cut of a swami rubbing his crystal ball had a certain fundamental appeal for the masses. House-written, the *World* column appeared under the by-line of Nostradamus.

McLeod scanned the printed lines quickly. There was a prediction on the outcome of the World Series. It had better turn out incorrect, thought McLeod: the *Star-Times* had spent a small fortune building up the opposing team. There was something about the dangers of forest fires and an indirect reference to the possibility of a conflagration next week in the Adirondack Game Preserve. (The *Star-Times* would be alerting its fire-fighting unit to prevent such a possibility, McLeod knew.) There was a talk of an impending war between Yugoslavia and France at a time when relations between the two countries were never more harmonious. McLeod wondered how the *World* would ever swing it. He read the last two items aloud.

"We think it's high time the mayor of New York be exposed for his corrupt political dealings. We wouldn't be surprised if the mayor were forced to resign his office in

January . . . What ace reporter of what rival New York daily is going to meet with a fatal accident next week? Remember, you read it here first!"

"January," said the mayor as Darius McLeod folded the column and lit a cigaret. "That's next month."

"They could be talking about me."

"Eh? If I'm forced to resign, you'll be scooped."

"Yeah, 'scooped,'" McLeod mused. "We're their chief rival. I'm the big Huck-a-muck over here. Those dirty sons — they can get me out of the way and scoop us at the same time. Listen, Your Honor, check back with me later. I've got to see the City Editor."

"But I'm not politically corrupt —"

"We'll decide. We'll let you know," Darius McLeod shouted, already running from his glass-walled office and through the clattering din of the City Room; disturbing the milling knot of scribes and gunmen going over last minute instructions from the Crime Editor, shouldering by the line of trim, pretty co-respondents receiving their briefs from the Society Editor, almost knocking down the Medical Editor who was either on the point of finding a cure for the

*World's* latest plague or dreaming up one of his own, McLeod didn't remember which.

McLEOD found Overman, the City Editor, perched on a corner of his desk and barking orders into a microphone. "What do you mean, he won't jump? We said he'd jump. Coax him. Push him if you can get away with it, I don't care. Don't make it obvious." Overman cocked his gaunt head to one side, listening to the receiver imbedded in his ear. He looked like a walking ad for hyper-thyroid treatment, with bulging eyes, hollow cheeks and fidgety limbs. He couldn't sit still and he didn't try. "All right, we'll hold up the story. And you're the guy who asked for a raise." Overman dropped the microphone hose back into its cubby and looked up. "Sometimes I wonder what the hell they think a reporter draws his salary for. What do you want, Darius?"

"The *World's* gunning for me, chief."

"I already saw it."

"Then don't just sit there."

"What do you want me to do, hold your hand? Of course the *World's* gunning for you. Great story for them; and they also kill off our star reporter in the process. If they get away with it."

"Damn it!" McLeod exploded. "This is the twenty-second century. If the *World* says I'm going to meet with a fatal accident, then my life's in danger." McLeod winced at his own words. In a matter of minutes he had been reduced to the mayor's level and he didn't like it.

"Counter-prognostication has already taken steps, Darius. Don't go off the deep end on me. It happens like this every time. Even a top-flight reporter sheds his own sophistication when the story's about himself."

"How do you expect me to take it?"

"Just relax, that's all."

"Maybe you want me to write my own obituary."

"Don't try so hard to be funny. Excuse me." Overman cocked his head again and listened, then pulled out his microphone and barked: "All right, all right. Don't cry. We can't get them all. I'm not saying it was your fault. Report back in."

"What's the matter?" McLeod wanted to know.

"Harry Crippens is the matter. Remember Congressman Horner? That story yesterday?"

McLeod recalled it vaguely. Something about Horner committing suicide unexpectedly.

"Well, he didn't jump. The

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*World's Security Forces* rescued him and got a scoop. Another wrongo for us, Darius. That's the second story Crippens bungled this month."

"Maybe it wasn't Cripp's fault, chief." Crippens was a plump, owl-faced man with big, watery eyes swimming behind concave glasses. McLeod had always liked him. He was the grimdest, saddest, cryingest, most logical drunk McLeod had ever met. Wonderful drinking partner.

"I didn't say it was. Just thinking, though."

"If psychology flubbed a dub on Horner, you can't blame Cripp."

"Not what I mean. The *World's* prediction is vague, see? Who's a star reporter? How do you single the man out? Any big by-line guy will do, right?"

"I guess so."

"Crippens gets his share of by lines, Darius."

"Hey, wait a minute—"

"Why spend the time protecting you next week if we don't have to? It's expensive and not a sure thing. We'd hate to lose you, Darius."

"Thank you."

"But Crippens is bungling. He ought to meet the *World's* requirements. We do the job for them the first of next week. They get their story and we keep our number one man, alive. How does it sound?"

"Rotten," McLeod said. "I'm not going to sit by and let Cripp take that kind of rap for me. What kind of louse do you think I am, anyway?"

"Let it simmer, Darius. There's no hurry. I suppose His Honor has been around to use your crying towel?"

McLeod nodded. "That's right."

"I thought he would. It was your series of articles that got him elected in the first place. You saved my life, now support me. One of those deals. It was obvious the *World* would try to show corruption after their own candidate lost."

"Is the *Star-Times* going to protect Mayor Spurgess' record?"

OVERMAN jerked his head from side to side, the stretched, translucent lids blinking over popping eyes. "It's always easier to prove corruption than disprove it, you know that. We'd be backing the wrong animal, Darius. I've got it figured, though."

"How do you mean?"

"They won't have much of a story if something violent happens to the mayor between now and next month. I don't want to see it in LOOKING FORWARD, though. Just make it happen and get the scoop. See? We can't let the mayor resign. This is the surest way."

"Anything particular in mind?"

"It's your assignment, Darius. Whatever you do is all right with me."

"That poor guy treated me like his father-image before. Well—"

"You're not weakening, are you, Darius? There's no time for emotion in this business, none at all. You've got to go out and get a story before some other outfit changes it on you. Or you've got to make *their* stories fail to happen. And whatever you do, you've got to keep the TV outfits guessing. If news starts happening according to Hoyle, we're all through. Us and the *World* and all the other newspapers wouldn't stand a chance, not with TV right on the spot. Keep TV guessing. Confused. Never sure. Give some crumbs to the *World*, even, if you have to.

"So there's no time for thalamic responses, Darius. Do I make myself clear?"

McLeod bristled. "You never had to give me that kind of lecture. You think I'm a cub or something? Don't worry about Mayor Spurgess, we'll fix him up."

"Splendid. But there's something else. Crippens."

"I told you how I felt about that. I don't want any part of it. Talk about your Judas's —"

"Crippens or you, Darius. The *World*'s gunning. You know it."

"I can't tell you what to do. But I'll warn Cripp, that's all."

"That would make your own assignment rather difficult."

"What assignment are you talking about?"

"Crippens. The way I figure it, you have a lot at stake there. We'll let you handle Crippens."

"You're crazy!"

"You are if you refuse. We won't give you a single Security man for protection. Remember what they said in COMING EVENTS. Your one chance is to get Crippens before they get you and then let the *World* scoop us. I would suggest the first thing next Monday morning, but then, it's your baby."

"First Mayor Spurgess and now Crippens. Are you trying to make me a hatchetman?"

"A reporter, Darius. You've always been a good one."

"But Crippens is my friend."

"I wish we had another way out. Crippens has his place on the *Star-Times*, but we thought too much of him. We don't want to lose you, Darius. You can take that as an objective compliment and sleep easy. Your job's secure."

"Thank you very much."

"Don't be bitter. A man in the newspaper business is top-dog these days, see? I don't have to

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tell you. We're not passive receptors. We control things. We make things happen. We play God, but we've got competition. You've got to take the good with the bad, that's all. See what I mean?" All the while they had spoken, Overman had not moved from where he had perched his small frame on his desk, but his nervous legs had walked miles, his scrawny, sleeve-rolled arms had waved, flapped and gesticulated, his wide, bulging eyes had darted about the frenzied confusion of the great room where news was created and missed nothing. It was Overman's passion, McLeod knew, his alpha through omega. He suddenly wished it were that simple for himself. Less than half an hour ago, it would have been.

"We'll have our obituary people compose something tender for Crippens," Overman said. "Keep me informed, Darius."

"I haven't told you I'd do it."

"Whose obit would you rather see them write?"

"You could protect me instead."

But Overman jerked his head side to side again. "It's the same as politics. Much simpler to make news than to prevent it. The one sure way to protect you, provided you don't foul things up with Crippens."

"Well, I don't —"

"One of you makes the obituary page next week. The *World's* already seen to that. Take your choice, Darius."

"Yeah . . . sure."

"And don't forget about Mayor Spurgess. You've got a busy time ahead of you. Good luck."

Walking back toward his own office, McLeod saw that the flow of co-respondents had slowed to a trickle. He swore softly. The last girl in line was Tracy Kent, a tawny-haired divorce specialist with an admirable record. McLeod liked Tracy, but it was strictly brother-sister stuff.

Tracy was going to marry Harry Crippens.

## CHAPTER II

"HEY, Darius. A girl gets hungry for lunch around this time every day."

McLeod smiled. "Won't Cripp be along soon?"

"Search me." Tracy rubbed her stomach under the smooth, tautly drawn fabric of her dress. "When this piece of machinery starts to gurgle, I eat."

"Well, I was going to head over to the Press Club in a few minutes anyway. Don't you have to get yourself caught with someone to-

day?"

"Later on. Tonight. Now I'm hungry."

Tracy Kent was long and almost lean with hips angular rather than rounded and the clean lines of her long-striding legs accentuated by the tight sheath of skirt as she walked with McLeod toward the elevator. She was all woman unless you happened to look at her a certain way, when you caught a glimpse of something coltish, almost like Peter Pan, in the way she carried herself or smiled at you. She did not look like a vamp, thought McLeod, which helped explain why she was such a successful co-respondent.

"One of these days I'm going to stop feeling like a brother toward you," McLeod promised as they climbed into his copter on the roof.

"You're flattering but tardy, Mr. McLeod. I'm going to marry the guy."

"Crippens?"

"Don't look at me that way. He's your friend, too." Tracy grinned as the rotors flashed above them, then pouted. "Darius, do we have to go to the Press Club for lunch?"

"Mixing business with pleasure, I guess. Got to see some people. Why, does someone bother you

over there?"

"That Weaver Wainwright, always staring at me like he wants to sit down at his thinkwriter and let the world know what it's like with a co-respondent. Me."

"Wainwright's one of the men I want to see."

"The *Star Times'* hot-shot reporter hob-nobbing with that riff-raff from the *World*?"

"You named it," Darius McLeod said as their copter rose up from the roof of the *Star Times* building and retreated from the checkerboard pattern of other copters resting on their landing squares. "Why the sour face?"

"Because I read COMING EVENTS, Darius. Do you think Wainwright's been assigned the job?"

"It's a damned good guess. He just got back from overseas. He's been sopping up spirits like a blotter over at the club and making nasty noises while waiting for a new job. This is probably his baby."

"Why, Darius?"

"Because he's their number one boy."

"No. I mean, why you?"

McLeod shrugged. "Does there have to be a reason? It's good copy for them. The *Star-Times* loses a guy who's been around,

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too. That's the newspaper business, Tracy. Don't look for any reason."

"Don't be so calm about it. What's Overman going to do?"

McLeod considered the question as he brought the copter down expertly through the lanes of local traffic here at the edge of the city. Off in the distance, rank on rank of hemispherical suburban homes marched off, in orderly rows, to the eastern horizon. The Press Club, almost directly below them now, had snipped half a dozen square miles from the patterned picture. It was castle, game preserve and sylvan retreat not for one monarch, but for hundreds. Newshounds, newshens, gunmen. Flashing letters swam up at them from the green woodland, blinking on and off garishly — THE FOURTH ESTATE.

If he told her Overman had failed to offer any protection, she'd realize another alternative had been selected. It would be better if he lied. "What's Overman going to do?" he repeated her question. "The usual. I'll be protected. Don't worry about me."

"But if Wainwright's all they say, he's like a bloodhound. Be careful, Darius."

"Hell, I said don't worry. I have till next week, anyway."

"This is Friday."

"Yeah, Friday." Their copter alighted with hardly a quiver. Uniformed lackies were already polishing the chrome and glass by the time McLeod helped Tracy to the ground. She came down lithely, long hair whipping about her face and brushing against McLeod's cheek. A girl scantily clad as an American Indian led them across the landing field and along a path through the gnarled oaks which made the Fourth Estate resemble more a chunk of Scotland than Long Island. But while they couldn't see the acres of neon tubing from the ground, their pulsing glow spoiled the effect.

THE clubhouse itself was an architectural nightmare of quarry-stone, turrets, battlements — and great, soft-hued thermoglass walls. Music stirred the air faintly with rhythm as they crossed the drawbridge (which actually worked, McLeod knew) and entered the lobby. The pretty little squaw disappeared and was replaced at once by the weapon-check girl, dressed in top hat and tails; but not much else.

She smiled professionally at Tracy, then frisked her expertly, finding the trick pocket in her skirt and removing the tiny but

deadly parabeam from her leg holster. Tracy grinned back like a yawning cat. "I'd have given it to you."

"I'm sorry, m'am. They all say that." The weaponcheck girl turned to McLeod. "It's the law around here, you know that. Good afternoon, Mr. McLeod."

The hands darted with quick, practiced precision over him after he nodded. He felt the sleeve-holster slip out by way of his armpit, was given a numbered check for both weapons as the girl hip-wagged away and suspended their weapons from hooks in her arsenal. They were then led to a table near the bandstand, where they ordered cocktails.

"It's an awful lot of fuss just to eat lunch," Tracy said. "Every time that weapon hen paws me like that, I want to scratch her big, wide eyes out. Darius, I'm still afraid for you. Is Wainwright here?"

"I haven't looked, but don't worry. I have till next week, anyway."

"They could kidnap you and hold you somewhere till they're ready to kill you."

McLeod tried to hide his momentary confusion by making a production of lighting his cigaret and smiling at someone he hardly

knew at a nearby table. Tracy certainly had a good point — which he hadn't considered until now.

Tracy glanced about uneasily in the dim light. "Did Overman think of that? I don't see any Security men around."

McLeod exhaled a long plume of smoke and watched it get sucked into the unseen currents of the climatizer. "They don't let themselves get seen," he said easily. "They wouldn't be good Security men if they did, would they?"

"But what are *you* going to do, Darius? Can't you take some kind of positive action? It's not like you, just sitting around and waiting."

McLeod wanted to change the subject, for Tracy had a way of ferreting out the truth even if she suspected nothing. He'd always thought she was wasting her time as a co-respondent and often told her so, but she'd always countered by striking a bump-and-grind pose and saying she had all the equipment. "Have you heard about Cripp?" he asked her now.

"Only that he was going out on an assignment. Suicide I think."

"Unfortunately, the guy had a change of heart. They had to tear up the obit."

"Was it Cripp's fault?"

"I doubt it. Suicide and murder

are two different things. Psychology fouled up, that's all."

"But Overman must have been furious, anyway. Poor Cripp."

"Overman'll get over it. Cripp's a good man."

Tracy shook her head slowly. "Thanks for saying it, but Cripp isn't cut out for the newspaper racket and you know it. A couple more flubs and Overman will begin to think Cripp belongs to the Anti-Newspaper League or something."

"Very funny," McLeod told her. "I can just see it now: Cripp a subversive."

"Shh!" said Tracy, raising a finger to her lips. "We shouldn't even talk about things like that. Mentioning the Anti-Newspaper League in here is like eating beef-steak in Delhi."

A figure approached their table and sat down at the empty chair without receiving an invitaton. "Did I hear something about the Anti-Newspaper League?" the man demanded, chuckling softly. He was tall and gaunt but well-tanned, the whites of his eyes very bright against the skin of his face. He had a long, sad nose which drooped mournfully almost to his upper lip, mitigating the effect of his smile.

He was Weaver Wainwright, ace reporter of the *World*.

"WE'RE just a couple of subversives, Mr. Wainwright," Tracy said.

"So that's why the *Star-Times* is filling its pages with wrongos these days. How do you do, McLeod?"

"Never felt better. Ought to live to be a hundred, at least. Can we get you something?"

"As a matter of fact, I've just had lunch. Brandy might help my sluggish liver, though."

"Brandy it is," said McLeod, and gave the new order to their waiter when he arrived with a pair of Gibsons. "According to what I read in the papers, the *World's* thinking of starting a Tong War with us." McLeod hid his impulse to smile by making a conventional toast to Tracy. He wondered how much his unexpected candor had unnerved Wainwright and decided to study the reporter's reaction carefully.

But Wainwright merely grinned, making the upper lip all but disappear and the nose become more prominent. "At least you read a good newspaper," he said. "I don't think it's fair for you to say we had war in mind, McLeod. Nothing of the sort. Our Prognostication division merely indicated that a certain well-known opposition newsman was going to meet with an unfortunate accident next week.

While prognostication is pretty reliable — especially coming from a good newspaper — it's hardly the last word. Ah, here's my brandy." And he began to sip and stare over the rim of his glass at Tracy.

"Nice stay in Europe?" McLeod wanted to know. Under the circumstances, Wainwright's composure had been admirable.

"Fair. But then, you read the papers."

"You mean that business about Yugoslavia and France?"

"That's right. Your man — What's his name, Kitrick? — thought there would be peace. He's wrong, you know. All you have to do is touch a spark to the right fuse in the Balkans, I always said. Kitrick was trying to put the fire out by spitting."

"Wayne Kitrick didn't think there was any fire to put out," Tracy told the *World* reporter. "As of now, there isn't."

"Give it some time," Wainwright promised. "You see, the President of Yugoslavia was indiscreet in his youth, most indiscreet. With elections approaching there, he had the alternative of — well, you know what a newspaper can do to a man of position who's been indiscreet. Drink to it?"

They did. In spite of everything, McLeod had to admire Wainwright.

In the old days, nations went to war for economic reasons, over diametrically opposed political philosophies, because of religion. Today, a sharp reporter dug deep to unearth closeted skeletons and moral potsherds and literally blackmailed a chief of state into war. Wainwright was sharp, all right. History might one day write up the whole series of twenty-second century wars as Blackmail Wars, but, meanwhile the U. N. could only gnash its collective teeth while Wainwright picked up a fattened paycheck.

"I'll bet you're proud of yourself," Tracy said.

"I don't see why not. Kitrick will be reamed, my dear."

"And so will a few million innocent people."

"Perhaps you weren't fooling when you mentioned the Anti-Newspaper League. But of course, you're pulling my leg."

"I'm a co-respondent," Tracy said coldly. "I don't have to turn cart wheels over your end of the newspaper game."

"Tracy," McLeod said. This was one facet of the girl's character he'd never seen before. He could almost see the gears meshing into place inside Wainwright's skull. He didn't mind talk which bordered on the subversive, as

long as it came from Tracy, who was quite outspoken about a lot of things, but Wainwright might have other ideas.

But Wainwright said, blandly, "From a moral standpoint you carve out your pound of flesh every now and then too, my dear. Or don't you think framing innocent men in compromising circumstances is immoral?"

"You wouldn't understand the difference," Tracy said.

"It is a difference of degree, not kind."

TRACY bit her lips and did not reply. It was like a revelation to McLeod. He suddenly wondered if Cripp knew how maladjusted his fiancee was.

Abruptly, Wainwright changed the subject. "Are you well insured, McLeod?"

"I never could figure out who to name as beneficiary."

"That's a shame."

"If you've planned anything now, I thought you'd like to know *Star-Times* Security Forces are all around us," McLeod bluffed.

"You underestimate me, sir. Prognostication comes up with the raw facts, which I sift for story material. I merely wait for things to happen. However, in case you have any inclinations to put the

shoe on the other foot, I'm sure you realize *World Security* men often lunch at the Fourth Estate."

That, McLeod suspected, was no bluff. Tracy was still nibbling on her lip but managed to cast a worried look in his direction. They ordered and ate in silence while Wainwright swirled and sipped another brandy.

"Have you heard about poor Mayor Spurgess?" Wainwright asked as McLeod cooled his coffee with cream.

McLeod scalded his lips. The *World* reporter was playing cat-and-mouse with him, taunting him overtly. Perhaps Wainwright figured he could kill two birds with one stone, getting McLeod while McLeod tried to protect the mayor's record. He hoped Wainwright had not thought of Overman's alternative.

"You're a busy man," McLeod finally said.

"I detest inactivity. I assume since you wrote Mayor Spurgess into office, you are going to protect his name. Miss Kent, could you excuse yourself for a moment?"

Tracy waited until McLeod nodded, then stood up and mumbled something about going to powder her nose. McLeod lit a cigaret and waited.

"Now we can talk," Wainwright

said. "Recognize the spirit in which this is said, McLeod: you're a fine reporter."

"Thanks."

"But you're as good as dead. We've written your obituary."

Strangely, the announcement brought no fear. Although it had only been a couple of hours, McLeod felt as if he'd been living with the idea for years. "You haven't printed it yet."

"In time. But we don't have to print it. Naturally, it's news, McLeod. You have a well-known name. But there are others equally well-known. More well known. We can come up with a wrongo occasionally. Basically, we want to kill you because you're too valuable to the *Star Times*."

"Your motive doesn't interest me. And I have some news for you: I'm a long way from dead."

"Don't be melodramatic, McLeod. We'll get you. A routine assassination-accident doesn't often become a wrongo, you know that. We have decided to make an offer to you."

Now McLeod's skin did begin to crawl. Statistically, the assassination-accident case was more fool-proof than any other. Gunmen commanded good salaries and did their work expertly. Ninety five per cent accuracy could be

expected. "I'm listening."

"Join the *World*."

"Come again?"

"I'm sure you heard me. Quit the *Star-Times* and join us. We'll match your salary, we won't kill you —"

"But the *Star-Times* will!"

"You'd be valuable to us, aside from your abilities as a reporter. No doubt, they've included you in any long-range plans they might have. We'll have them piling up wrongos from now till doomsday."

"Which is exactly why they'll have me killed if I become a turncoat."

"We'll offer you full protection."

"I'm already getting full protection — from the *Star-Times*," McLeod lied. It was almost a tempting offer, although it's virtues were purely negative. The *Star-Times* had refused to offer him protection because Overman thought it would be simpler and more certain to serve up a substitute reporter for the kill. If McLeod accepted Wainwright's offer, at least he'd be able to sleep easy regarding Crippens. But if the *World's* real purpose was to remove McLeod from the *Star-Times'* staff, one way or the other, they might risk an all-out Tong War and still gun for him.

Besides, no turncoat newspaper-

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man had ever survived six months. McLeod knew it and was sure Wainwright knew it and guessed the *World* reporter was promising him all he could under the circumstances — a temporary reprieve.

"I know what you're thinking," Wainwright told him. "The *Star-Times* will get you if you turn on them. If necessary, they'll drop everything else until you're dead."

"Well, yes. That's just what I was thinking."

"I don't envy your position," Wainwright admitted. "You believe I'm offering you a few months more of life at best. But you're mistaken, McLeod. *It will appear as if we have killed you.* We can do it, working together. But I offer you life. The accident will all but destroy you, although means of identification will remain. Don't you see what I'm driving at? We can substitute some derelict for you, then change your appearance and employ you on the *World*. The *Star-Tmes* will never know the difference."

IT was a daring plan. It was just the sort of thing which made the newspaper business in general — and Weaver Wainwright in particular — so omnipotent these days. McLeod did not try to hide his interest. The plan had more

than negative virtues, after all. "How do I know I can trust you?" McLeod asked.

"I'm afraid you don't. But let it simmer. What it boils down to is this: you're going to have to take a calculated risk either way, McLeod. No doubt, you've devised some scheme to give us a fat wrongo instead of your corpse. It may or may not work. Statistics say it will not. On the other hand, I promise you life. My plan not only could work, it *should* work. The risk there is that I may not be telling the truth. You'll have to decide . . . here comes Miss Kent."

"The girl with the crooked face," said Tracy, sitting down. "Unless you tell me it's straight."

"As an arrow," said McLeod, hardly hearing his own words. The more he thought of Wainwright's plan, the better he liked it: If Wainwright were telling the truth, he'd be able to get both Cripp and himself off the hook at the same time. "I'll think about it," he told the *World* reporter, who was smiling and getting up to leave.

"Call me," Wainwright said, and was gone.

"What did he want?" Tracy asked.

"The usual," McLeod told her, realizing a near-truth was often the best lie. "That I join up with

the *World* and get protected."

"You wouldn't last a month and you know it. So why did you tell him you'd think about it?"

"To let him think I was playing both ends against dead center, I guess. I don't know. I just want to come out of this thing alive, Tracy."

"I was thinking. There must be something we could dig up about Weaver Wainwright, something we could hold over his head so he'd rather be guilty of a wrongo than see it revealed."

"I doubt it. Anyway, you don't blackmail newspapermen."

"You don't kill them, either. Darius, did you ever stop to think how — how awfully evil this whole setup is? I don't mean just about you and how the *World* wants to make a story out of killing off the opposition. I mean everything. I mean Weaver Wainwright starting a war in Europe so his paper can get the inside story on it. I mean the President of Yugoslavia being blackmailed by a garden variety newspaperman. I mean Cripp getting chewed out because he went to cover a suicide and the man didn't jump. We ought to celebrate, don't you see? A human life was saved. I mean me getting myself caught with important men so their wives sue for divorce and we

get the story. I mean disease that doesn't have to happen and medical cures held back until one paper or another can scoop them. I mean scientific discoveries which aren't made because research scientists and development engineers are on newspaper payrolls and perform their basic research and experiments, then wait for the newspaper stories to be released at an editor's leisure. I mean . . . oh, what's the use? You're laughing at me."

McLeod was trying not to smile but meeting with little success. "I just never heard you talk—like that before, that's all. Tracy, you're like a little girl in a lot of ways — idealistic, romantic, building castles on air and not accepting the real world, but —"

"Real!" Tracy cried. "It's phony from the word go. We're making it — to suit headlines."

"Stop shouting," McLeod said in alarm. "People are staring at you."

"I don't care about them."

"Well, I do. Before you know it, they'll be investigating you for Anti-Newspaper tendencies. What's the matter with you?"

"My God! Don't sound so gosh-awful righteous, Darius. You treat this newspaper business like a religion."

"Maybe I like being top dog."

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"So now you're going to get yourself killed. A sacrifice to the Headline God."

"Stop it," McLeod said. "I won't get killed if I can help it."

"And if Wainwright can help it too, is that the idea?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Sometimes I . . . I hate you, Darius McLeod. That's what I'm talking about. They're going to kill someone else and change your face and let you work for the *World*." Tracy stood up and patted her lips with a napkin.

McLeod climbed to his feet too. "How did you know about that?"

"Don't bother getting up. I can find my way back alone, thank you."

McLeod sat down, staring at her.

"Maybe it's because I'm a spy. Maybe I work for the *World*." Tracy pivoted and stalked away, her heels click-clacking defiantly on the marble floor. McLeod gaped after her until she disappeared.

## CHAPTER III

**M**CLEOD made an appointment to see Jack Lantrel, the Gunman Chief of the *Star-Times*, Saturday morning. He spent the remainder of Friday pondering and drinking a little too much. The combination yielded a hangover,

but not even tentative conclusions. While Tracy Kent had become an unexpected enigma, he couldn't spend too much time on it. Wainwright's proposal nagged at all his thoughts, but he kept telling himself he couldn't trust the *World* reporter. And for the first time he found he didn't like the feeling of power inherent in a newspaperman's position. Having the power of life and death over nameless, faceless people was one thing, but playing the role of the Greek hag who snipped the thread of life with a pair of indifferent scissors for Crippens was quite another.

Lantrel met McLeod in the Gunman's office, greeted him and said, "Dragging me down on Saturday, this better be important." Jack Lantrel was a harried-looking little man. You always expected a great, bosomy wife to come charging in to henpeck him, although, like McLeod, Lantrel was a bachelor. He straightened the thinkwriter and the other items of office equipment on his desk with mechanical efficiency. He was an old fuddy-duddy, thought McLeod, but he had signed the death warrants for hundreds of people.

"It's a job," said McLeod.

"Well, that's what I draw my check for. But we work on a rigid schedule, Darius."

"Then call it a priority job. Mayor Spurgess."

Lantrel looked up from where he'd been drumming his fingers idly on the desk. "Motive is none of my business," he admitted. "But did you say you want to have Mayor Spurgess gunned?"

McLeod sighed. "Yeah."

"I'm glad my particular job is comparatively simple. You just elected the guy."

"And now we want him killed. Overman would sleep easier and so would I if you did it by tomorrow night."

Lantrel grunted something, prodded the intercom button on his desk and demanded in his high-pitched voice, "Will you please get me the habit file on Mayor Spurgess?" He turned to McLeod. "Sunday night, eh? That doesn't give us much time."

McLeod shrugged and watched a secretary bring in a bulging plastic file envelope which Lantrel flipped through expertly. "Here we are. Subject generally dines late Sunday night, reviews his Monday morning schedule, smokes a pipe and plays with the TV set until he's convinced there's nothing to interest him, then . . . oh! here we are . . . takes a walk around twenty-two hundred hours, alone, without his wife."

"Sounds simple," McLeod said.

"An assassination-accident," Lantrel informed him with surprising enthusiasm, "is never simple. Despite the statistical expectancy of success, there are too many random factors you have to contend with. If the weather's bad, perhaps subject won't take his evening constitutional. Perhaps subject's wife will break the pattern with some company for dinner. Subject might conceivably take a friend along with him. You see what I'm driving at?"

McLeod nodded. "All I want to know is this: can you do the job Sunday night?"

Lantrel scanned the file again. "Subject leaves his house at twenty-two hundred, returns by twenty-two forty-five. That gives us forty-five minutes. Probably, Darius."

"Good enough."

LANTREL slid a gunman form into his thinkwriter, hunched himself down in his chair and watched the machine type. Presently the sheet of paper slipped out the other side of the squat machine and McLeod read:

**DATE:** 14 Dec 2103

**NAME:** Darius John McLeod

**ASSIGNMENT (CURRENT):** City  
Desk

**JOB NO.:** 03-4-12

## IMAGINATION

**CLASSIFICATION:** Top Priority  
**SUBJECT:** Peter Winston Spurgess, Mayor, New York City

**DATE OF EXECUTION**

(APPROX): 15 Dec 2103

**METHOD:** Vehicular, or other, accident**CODE:** 4-12-DJM**APPROVED:** /s/Jack Lantrel

**JACK LANTREL**  
**GUNMAN EDITOR**

THE UNDERSIGNED HEREBY CERTIFIES THAT JOB NO. 03-4-12, HEREAFTER REFERRED TO AS 4-12-DJM, HAS BEEN ORDERED IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE EXISTING REGULATIONS GOVERNING ASSASSINATION-ACCIDENTS, AND THAT 4-12-DJM HAS BEEN APPROVED, ORALLY OR IN WRITING, BY THE City Editor. THE UNDERSIGNED IS COGNIZANT OF THE FACT THAT ANY FRAUD OR DECEIT IN THIS APPLICATION, WHETHER FOR PERSONAL GAIN OR OTHERWISE, IS PUNISHABLE BY SUMMARY REVOCATION OF HIS (HER) NEWS-PAPER LICENSE.

**DARIUS JOHN McLEOD**

It suddenly was no simple matter for McLeod to scrawl his name at the bottom of the sheet. He was aware of Lantrel, a puzzled expression on his face, watching him. It seemed entirely routine to affix his signature, but quite suddenly he was aware of the machinery that would put into operation. Gunmen would be selected for the job, would study Mayor Spurgess' habit file, would agree with Lantrel

on the *modus operandi*. Within thirty-six hours, Mayor Spurgess would be dead.

Darius McLeod executioner?

Hardly. He was merely carrying out an assignment. Newspapers were active agents in the modern world. If it had not been his assignment, it would have been someone else's. You could hardly consider it murder. Murder was punishable today as it had always been— by capital punishment or a long prison term. A newspaperman was above reproach — or imprisonment.

McLeod saw the parallel that he had first seen in Overman's office yesterday. He was both executioner and victim. Even now as he was signing the application for Mayor Spurgess' death, perhaps Weaver Wainwright was signing one which read, SUBJECT: Darius John McLeod, reporter, New York *Star-Times*. The *World* Gunman Editor might now be studying his habit file, weighing the various factors to determine what situation seemed most promising as a vessel for his "accidental" death. Did the editor know that McLeod often spent weekends racing across country or down to South America in his jet? It was there in his habit file in all probability. Did he know that McLeod visited the

*Star-Times* space station once every fortnight because he was being groomed to cover the *Star-Times* dash to the moon, if ever they got the jump on the *World* space station and could leave Earth's gravitational field without the near-certainty of being tracked and shot down by a *World* rocket? Did he know the thousand one little habits which, combined in various predictable patterns, made up McLeod's life? Unfortunately, the answer had to be in the affirmative. It left McLeod feeling a little sick.

"What's the matter, Darius? Is something wrong?"

"Huh? No. Nothing," McLeod signed the application. "There you are."

"Fine," said Lantrel, placing the application in his out basket. "Call me at home tomorrow afternoon, Darius. I'll give you the details so you can cover the assignment. You know the number?"

McLeod said that he did and left. He wondered if Weaver Wainwright would make a similar call. The worst part of it was that he didn't know when.

WHEN he reached his bachelor apartment in the East Seventies, the door recorder told him that two visitors, one male and one female, were waiting for

him. McLeod felt the comforting bulk of his parabeam in its arm holster and loosened it there. If they had entered his apartment it was because their fingerprint patterns had been included in the locking mechanism, but he couldn't take any chances. He opened the door and sighed his relief.

"Morning, Darius," Harry Crippens greeted him cheerfully, bouncing up from a web-chair and extending his hand. "Shake hands with a reporter who just got a big, fat, unexpected raise."

McLeod lit a cigaret and said, "I'm very glad to hear that, Cripp. Did Overman tell you?"

"Nope. First I knew of it, I read it in the paper. Take a look."

As McLeod took this morning's *Star-Times* from Crippens, Tracy entered the living room from the kitchen. "Coffee in a minute, Cripp," she said. "Oh, Darius. We're making ourselves to home, as the expression goes. Did you see that crazy thing in the paper?"

"I'm about to," said McLeod.

"Crazy!" Crippens cried in mock horror. "I get a raise right before we get married and she says crazy."

"Well, it doesn't make sense."

McLeod turned to the Internal Affairs page of the *Star-Times*. With the newspaper profession sup-

planting Hollywood fifty-odd years ago as the world's most glamorous, articles on internal affairs had evolved from small islands of type in a sea of advertisements to a place of importance with their own daily page and special editor.

"Three column head," Crippens said proudly. "Liberal quotes from the King himself. Maestro Overman."

"That's what I mean," Tracy repeated. "Crazy. Only yesterday, he was chewing you out."

The article said that a new star was on the *Star-Times* horizon, and went on to discuss all the successful assignments Crippens had handled. There was no mention of his wrongos which, McLeod knew, were considerable. A two-column cut of Crippens at his thinkwriter was included and the caption rendered a thumb-nail biography. The article concluded by mentioning a raise in salary which gave Crippens more than Tracy and almost what McLeod earned.

"That's great," McLeod said, finding it difficult to maintain his enthusiasm. Damn Overman, he didn't miss a trick. Fattening the calf for slaughter.

"Now the girl's got to marry me," Crippens declared. "I earn more money than she does." He was flip, building effusively in the

best newspaperman fashion. He was not the serious, intent Crippens McLeod had always known, although, on closer examination, McLeod realized that the owlish eyes looked quite sober.

"Quit your kidding," McLeod told him. "Harry Crippens would probably celebrate by discussing his next assignment, or making a study of the moral factors involved. What's the matter?"

"Not a thing," Crippens assured him easily. "Here, have a drink. It's your whisky."

"In the morning?" asked Tracy.

"This is a celebration, girl. There you go." And Crippens sloshed liquor into three glasses. His hands were shaking.

"I said what's the matter?" McLeod ignored the drink.

Crippens didn't. "Not a thing. Not a single, solitary thing."

"Go ahead and talk to him," Tracy said.

"Don't mind her, Darius. Have another?" Crippens poured for himself.

"Darn it, Cripp. Even if it means making me feel better?"

"Darius wouldn't do a thing like that, that's all."

"Like what?" McLeod wanted to know.

"I have to hand it to you,"

Tracy told him. "I thought you'd do your best to change the subject."

"Like nothing," Crippens said. "I mean it, don't mind her. She had some silly idea . . . I don't even want to talk about it."

"Darius," Tracy asked abruptly, "what have you decided to do about Weaver Wainwright?"

"Please," said Crippens.

"I haven't made up my mind yet. I'm not going to let him kill me if I can help it."

"Do tell. Does Cripp fit into the picture at all?"

McLeod hoped he could substitute evasion for outright lying. "Why don't you ask Overman?"

"Because I'm asking you."

He didn't think Tracy would ask Overman. He didn't think Overman would tell her the truth if she did. He saw she was waiting for an answer and said, "If the answer to that question were yes, you wouldn't expect me to tell you. If it were no, I ought to consider it an insult, coming from friends."

"We never stood on ceremonies before, Darius."

"Tracy, for gosh sakes!" Crippens pleaded. "Darius is my friend."

"I'm still waiting for an answer."

McLeod walked to the door and opened it. Crippens opened his mouth to speak, but changed his mind. He glared at Tracy.

"Get out of here," McLeod said. He was behaving like a child he realized. But more than anything else, he needed time to think.

Tracy went through the doorway, staring straight ahead. McLeod wished she would look at him, or holler, or slap him. She said, "All right, Darius. If that's the way you want to play it."

McLeod heard them arguing in low tones as he shut the door behind them.

Just what do you do, he thought, when your whole world starts to blow up all around you? You don't kick over the remaining traces. You try to re-establish the familiar, comforting pattern in some small way.

McLeod called the mayor's residence and got through to Spurgess at once. The flabby, thick-jowled face looked sickly white, like putty.

"McLeod, thank God. I thought you'd forgotten."

"Not on your life. I just wanted to tell you everything's going to be fine. You won't have to resign your office for political corruption. We'll see to that."

"Oh, thank you," said Mayor Spurgess. "Thank you very much."

"Sure," said McLeod, and cut the connection. Give or take a couple, Mayor Spurgess had about

thirty-six hours to live.

And McLeod?

**S**NOW was falling in thick, slow flakes which melted on contact with the ground when McLeod went outside after lunch. Since neither the *Star-Times* nor the *World* was depending on the cold virus or influenza for medical headlines this season, it was comparatively safe venturing out in this weather.

This, McLeod thought, seeing it for the first time in a strange, new light, was the city. Gray-white sky, overflowing snowflakes. Sidewalks, covered for the winter, conducting crowds of bovinely unaware people from place to place. Steel and glass and stone, soaring skyward, disappearing in the feathery white snow which, up above, was not feathery at all but a solid gray pall.

Did the cud-munching people know the truth about newspapers? McLeod doubted it. The old name had remained — newspapers — but the function had changed. We give them each day their daily cud. We don't report. We motivate. You didn't find it anyplace. It wasn't written. It happened and it was accepted. Maybe they did know. It might make a good book, if people ever went back to reading books again. Not yellow journalism, but

ROY G. BIV journalism, for all the colors in the rainbow. Concepts had changed. How? After the Third World War? The Fourth? People wanted to believe what they read. Each individual existence was precarious, cliff-edged, ready to fall or scramble back to safety. People believed. Almost, it was as if they had forgotten their Western Christian heritage, in which they moved through time from past to future, active agents in a static environment. Now they embodied the old Greek idea. People didn't flow. Time did. They stood backwards in the river of time, with the future flowing up, unseen, behind them, becoming the present, flowing on and becoming the past which lay, decipherable, before their eyes. Only newspapermen had eyes in the back of their heads.

Look out, cancer's coming. I read it in the *World*. (The *World* Medical Corps sows the seed, and the incidence of cancer increases.) Good newspaper, the *World*. Always lets you know what's coming. I see where the *Star-Times* says the cancer rate is dropping. Hope they're right. (Newspaper Medical Corps battle mightily, offstage, and the *Star-Times* wins. Temporarily, no more cancer.) What do you know, the *Star-Times* was right.

*Star-Times* says we ought to have

a spaceship on the moon soon. Thrilling, isn't it (*Star-Times* astronauts prepare to launch a two-stage rocket from their space station, but *World* astronauts intercept it with a guided missile and destroy it.) Well, looks like the *World* was right. Space travel soon, but not yet.

Senator Blundy's daughter was attacked on the campus of that there college up-state, what's its name? You read about it in the *Star-Times*? You know, it's not so bad, being small time, I always say. Things like that only happen to important people. Yes sir, we're lucky.

*World* says it's a Brinks, one of those unsolved robberies. Three million dollars from the Bank of New York! (But *Star-Times* detectives go to work and find — or sometimes frame — the criminal.) Hey, it's not a Brinks anymore. Maybe I ought to read the *Star-Times* more often.

That Weaver Wainwright earns six hundred thousand dollars a year, but my kid wants to be a politician. Some kids you just can't figure.

McLeod wandered into a bar and got himself mellowed, then found another and repeated the process. When he returned to the street and made his way to the sidewalk, the

snow had finally begun to stick. Someone in the bar had recognized him and asked for an autograph. It hadn't stirred him at all. Was he maturing or turning sour?

Returning home as dusk descended on the city and street lights gleamed on three inches of snow, McLeod learned from his door recorder that he had one female visitor. That would be Tracy, he thought, and prepared himself for more unpleasantness. Why couldn't they leave him alone?

"Come in, Darius. Shut the door." He did both, turned, and saw Tracy pointing a parabeam at him. His hand fumbled with the trick sleeve of his jacket, but the storm-coat got in his way. Tracy's parabeam zipped audibly and McLeod turned to stone.

#### CHAPTER IV

"I'LL unfreeze your head so you can talk. You realize I ought to kill you."

His head tingled and he found that he could open his mouth, blink his eyes and twitch his nose. He couldn't turn his neck. From the chin down he was helplessly immobile. He was a disembodied brain with a face. He wished he were sober.

"Cripp still doesn't believe me," Tracy said. "He insisted I come

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back alone and apologize. So I came back."

"But not to apologize."

"To get some information, Darius. I could be wrong. I don't think I am."

"Out at the Fourth Estate yesterday, you knew what kind of proposition Wainwright had made me," McLeod said, stalling for time while he tried to summon a logical defense. His mind was almost a blank.

"Sometimes I talk too much. Yes, I knew. Never mind how. I'm doing the questioning, and I want answers. When I read about Cripp in the Internal Affairs section, I put two and two together. Wainwright's assignment had been vague, so I guessed you and Overman had decided some substitution might be in order."

McLeod was silent.

"I advise you to talk, Darius. If I killed you now, it would be a bit ahead of schedule, but I think that would still satisfy Wainwright. Don't you?"

"You're bluffing," McLeod said — and hoped: "You couldn't possibly be on assignment to kill me. So you'd be subject to the same laws which face the general public for murder."

"All right. Maybe I won't kill you. But you feel no pain under a

parabeam, Darius. Remember that. I could start burning your hand with my lighter and work up to your elbow and you wouldn't even know — until I unfroze you."

"You wouldn't," McLeod said. "Maybe we don't see eye to eye now, but we're friends."

Tracy began nibbling at her lip. Her eyes were big and watery, as if she'd been fighting back tears. "Sure — I liked you. Maybe I still do. I don't know. I'm all mixed up. You know me, Darius. I'm liable to do anything — anything . . . when I'm all mixed up like this. I don't want to hurt you, not if I can help it. I like you, Darius. We've had fun together. Great times."

"That's better." McLeod's confidence was returning. He'd be out of freeze in no time now. "Just unfreeze me, and we can talk about this like two sensible people."

"I like you, but I'm in love with Cripp." Tracy removed her lighter from a pocket of her blouse with trembling fingers. She lit a cigarette and didn't extinguish the flame. She came closer to McLeod.

"Cut it out," he said. He felt sweat rolling down his forehead from his hairline and making his eyes blink. Parabeaming did peculiar, unpredictable things to the metabolism. The room seemed fur-

nace-hot.

"Then answer my question."

There was no sense being maimed, McLeod finally decided. Tracy knew the truth anyway. She just wanted to hear him say it. But now she brought a tiny mini-recorder into view from where it had been resting on a table and flipped the switch to on.

"What's that for?"

"Cripp. I want him to know. I want him to be able to protect himself from you. We're recording now, Darius. Answer this question: do you and Overman plan to use Cripp as a substitute corpse to satisfy Weaver Wainwright and the *World*? Is that why Cripp got his raise and all that unexpected publicity?"

McLeod licked his lips and tried to look down as Tracy's hand disappeared from view with the lighter. He saw no smoke but imagined his flesh beginning to crisp.

"Answer me. Did you and Overman plan to kill Cripp and give Wainwright his story that way?"

McLeod read nothing in her eyes, not even hatred. He said, "Yes. That's right."

Tracy shut off the mini-recorder, pocketed her lighter. She reversed the parabeam and McLeod felt his limbs begin to tingle with minute

sparks of pain.

"Don't try anything," Tracy said. "I'm still pointing this at you." Her voice caught. She tried to speak again but sobbed.

McLeod brought his arm up slowly and examined it. No damage.

"I — I guess you know I couldn't do it, Darius. I couldn't hurt you. But I don't want you to hurt Cripp. I want to give Cripp a fair chance. Have you signed an application for his death yet?"

"No."

"Will you?"

They were friends again. McLeod couldn't sense it. Friends who might try to hurt each other, of necessity, but friends. "I don't know," he said.

"Give him a break, Darius. There must be another way out. I could tell you things, if I could only trust you . . . ."

McLeod laughed easily, massaging his forearms. "Better not," he said. "Better get out of here."

"Maybe someday."

"Maybe. Thanks for telling me. You couldn't do it. That's good to know." He shouldn't have said that. He was acting compulsively, striking back blindly.

The color left Tracy's face. "That was only because you haven't actually threatened Cripp yet. Don't rely on it, though."

## IMAGINATION

She was striking back, too. He staggered to the door and watched her go. Crippens had himself a good woman there, the lucky s. o. b. Maybe that was why he hadn't rejected the idea of killing Crippens, McLeod thought.

SLEEPING that night, after a dinner which felt like slag inside him, McLeod dreamed he had just signed an application for his own demise on the steps of City Hall while bands played and people cheered. Mayor Spurgess was there with a television camera and kept on pleading for McLeod not to renege, but Tracy clung to the mayor's arm and tried to lure him away to a co-respondent rendezvous. Weaver Wainwright and Overman lurked on the fringe of the crowd, both pointing at McLeod and laughing. Harry Crippens was the gunman.

When McLeod awoke, a gray dawn was seeping in through the windows. He showered and downed some bicarbonate of soda in water, but still felt like hell. A mantle of snow covered the silent streets outside and more snow was falling. Even the meteorologist's job wasn't guesswork now, McLeod thought wryly. Predicting snow, the *Star-Times* had sowed the clouds for it.

It was suddenly very important for Mayor Spurgess not to die.

Early in the afternoon, McLeod called Jack Lantrel at home, but a pert-faced girl smiled at him from the screen. "I'm sorry, Mr. Lantrel is not at home. Is there a message?"

"It's important that I reach him," McLeod said.

"Mr. Lantrel is out. He left no number. What is it in reference to?"

"4-12-DJM," McLeod said, and waited while the receptionist disappeared from view.

"You're Mr. McLeod, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"You don't have to worry about 4-12-DJM, sir. Everything will be taken care of."

"There's been a change of plans. I want the gunmen called off."

The professional smile was replaced by a frown. "Only Mr. Lantrel can do that."

"That's why I want to reach him. I told you it was important."

"But I don't know when he'll be back. Confidentially, sir, Mr. Lantrel just hates snow. When he read in the paper it was going to snow, he said he was leaving town. I'm sorry."

McLeod asked if she knew where Lantrel usually went.

"That's hard to say. He likes to forget about business, you see. He's down south," she added brightly. "Someplace down south. Is there any message?"

"Yes," McLeod said. "I'll be home all day. If Mr. Lantrel calls, have him contact me at once."

But as the afternoon dragged on, McLeod thought it unlikely that the Gunman Chief would receive his message. He had reached the unexpected decision about Mayor Spurgess quite suddenly and now found it almost beyond analysis. He neither liked the mayor nor disliked him. It was not the man who must live, but the symbol.

Symbol? Of what?

McLeod found the idea mildly ridiculous, almost as if he were drumming up trade for the Anti-Newspaper League, self-proselytizing. It wasn't that for the first time in his life, he told himself, he found an intrinsic evil in the newspaper business. It was simply that the system had hit home for the first time, unexpectedly. He had set the machinery in motion for Mayor Spurgess' death; Weaver Wainwright had done the same for him; Overman had decided the *Star-Times* could not afford to lose his services but could manage without Harry Crippens.

There was no logical connection.

If Mayor Spurgess died, that was that. Flowers and a sad song for the widow. But the Wainwright-McLeod-Overman-Crippens problem still remained unsolved. Not to mention Tracy Kent.

Had he become anti-newspaper? The term almost defied definition. The Anti-Newspaper League was one thing, formal, organized, purposeful. But anti-newspaper could mean a lot of things. It could mean slight deviation, non-conformity, the simple desire to earn your keep in some other line. Such a desire was never realized, however. There were only three classes of newspapermen: working reporters, corpses and retired hounds and hens who lived on newspaper farms in old-folk luxury. A newspaperman simply knew too much to be allowed to change his line of work.

No, there was a fourth type. There was the Anti-Newspaper League. What was the old word — Quisling? It referred to politics or some other fields of endeavor, McLeod thought. He wasn't sure what. They were on newspaper payrolls but tried to gum up the works.

Logic was getting him nowhere. He belonged to no cut-and-dry category.

He wanted Mayor Spurgess to live.

Lantrel failed to call by dinner-time or afterwards. At twenty-hundred thirty, McLeod zipped on an insulined jumper, checked his parabeam and went out into the *Star-Times* snow.

## CHAPTER V

HIDDEN heat-coils melted the snow which managed to drift over the sidewalks despite their protective canopies, but the streets were covered with snow now more than a foot deep. McLeod felt it crunch underfoot as he left the sidewalks and headed for the mayor's house.

His breath exhaled in quick vapor-puffs against the cold, brittle air. His feet were heavy in the snow but dry. His were the only set of footsteps marring the white blanket which covered everything.

It occurred to him all at once that Mayor Spurgess would likely forego his evening walk because of the weather. Which necessitated another type of accident. Lantrel's men were both experienced and imaginative. You could write a book categorizing all the possibilities . . .

Wind whipped around corners and sprayed McLeod's face with snowflakes. He heard a voice calling far off in the fuzzy white dim-

ness, but soon it was gone. Finally, he reached the mayor's house — a red-brick, white-columned Georgian structure massive and secure on a large corner lot. He crouched behind a leafless privet hedge-row in the driveway and waited, peering up occasionally at the cheery yellow squares of light that were the second storey windows. His ear-crono whispered the time to him: twenty-two hundred hours.

The tell-tale footsteps he had left in the snow were fast disappearing as the flakes fell thicker. He slid his parabeam out through the jumper's trick sleeve and felt the cold knife momentarily into his bare arm. The feeling of warm security, so paradoxical under the circumstances, left him. If he foiled Lantrel's gunmen, Overman would learn of it. If he didn't foil them but tried — which seemed more likely — Overman would also hear.

Just what was he doing here, anyway?

He flexed his stiff muscles and was on the point of standing up when he saw three figures approaching down the street, vague as ghosts in the snow. There was still time. He could intercept them and say he had come to cover the story, something which was expected

of him. He wondered what sort of accident they had planned.

He jogged toward them through the snow, met them still half a block from Spurgess' house. Two were young, possibly still in training. They were tall and looked like soldiers in their slick jumpers. They stared at him arrogantly. The third was shorter, heavier, of calculating eye. The expression of the first two faces said: *we're gunmen—whatever you are, we're better*. The third face said: *we'd as soon kill you as spit, but we don't kill except for hire or when provoked in the line of duty*.

"I'm from the paper," McLeod told them, whispering. "Here to cover the story."

The three faces stared back at him through the snow, crystallizing what he had felt all day but had not been able to explain. Those faces.

They had nothing against Mayor Spurgess. Perhaps they had never even seen him. If they didn't like him and had a reason and wanted to kill him, that wouldn't be so bad. That would be fine. But they were here to kill him because McLeod had signed the application along with Lantrel. They wanted to do the job and get back to warmer places and hot buttered rum or whatever they liked.

"He come out yet?" the older gunman asked.

"I don't think he will, not in this weather. What other plans have you got?"

"We'll just wait and see. We don't have to make the plans."

Had they been able to read McLeod's face as readily as he had read theirs? "I don't understand," he said. "You'll have to think of something else if he doesn't take his walk, won't you?"

"You say you were from the paper, guy?"

"Of course."

"Well, you're not making sense."

McLEOD toyed with his parac-  
beam, then watched as mat-  
ching weapons leaped into the  
hands of the two younger gunmen.

"What paper, guy?" the older one drawled.

McLeod felt his heart flutter wildly and checked a strong impulse to laugh.

One of the young gunmen said, "I thought the big boy himself was covering this. Wainwright. I know what he looks like."

"Come on, guy. What paper?"

McLeod knew the mistake could be fatal. Somehow the *World* had learned what the *Star-Times* had planned for Mayor Spurgess. These men were *World* gunmen, come to

thwart Lantrel's men. Perhaps they could, but McLeod might die in the process.

"Listen," he said desperately. "The other day, Weaver Wainwright made me a proposition."

"Who are you?"

"Darius McLeod. Hold on, damn it! If you freeze me now, you'll be making a mistake. Wainwright wanted me to work for the *World*. That's why I'm here, don't you understand? I can tell you exactly what the *Star-Times* is going to do."

"We already know, McLeod. You're skating where the signs say not to, guy. I guess you know that."

"Won't Wainwright be here? Ask him."

"Don't know if he will or not."

One of the younger gunmen had circled around behind McLeod. The other one stood facing him, pointing the parabeam at his chest. The older man seemed to be enjoying himself.

"I don't want Spurges killed," McLeod said. "That's the truth. I came here to prevent it myself."

"Can you tell me why?"

"No — yes. Because I want to accept Wainwright's proposition. The *World* said I was going to die. Wainwright offered me life."

"We know that you're going to die."

McLeod sucked in his breath. This same wholesome trio had probably received the application for his own death, had probably studied his habit file. "Not before next week," McLeod said.

"Now, I don't know. It's a gift horse, guy. They won't hold up our checks for a couple of hours either way."

"No, but you'll spend the rest of your life as a gunman if you cross Wainwright."

The voice behind McLeod's back seemed bodiless and as cold as the falling snow. "What's wrong with that?"

"You wouldn't understand," McLeod said without turning. "He would." He would win his life the moment he won over the shorter man. His two companions did not matter. "Look. The Gunman Editor on the *World* is near retirement, isn't he? You look like you've been around, but you won't be considered for the job if Wainwright bears a grudge."

"He's pretty smooth," the young gunman with the parabeam said.

"Why do you think I'm here at all?" McLeod insisted. "I didn't know you were coming. I came to prevent this thing myself."

THE man behind McLeod muttered a curse and said, "You

came here for the same reason you always go out on an assignment. To get the story."

But the older man said, "Have you any proof?"

"Only Wainwright. Ask him when he gets here."

"If he decides to come," said the man with the parabeam,

"And if he doesn't?" McLeod demanded. "Are you going to take a chance and —"

"It wouldn't be taking a chance at all," the older man told McLeod. "We could freeze you and box you and ask Wainwright about it later."

"You fool! I haven't told Wainwright one way or the other yet."

"Then we could unfreeze you and let him decide. Go ahead, George."

McLeod could never hope to freeze all three of them before they froze him. Their actions were cut from the same Kantian categorical imperative he had expected of himself and all newspapermen — until today. He felt sorry for himself because it no longer applied, but that hardly helped.

"Someone's coming," the voice behind McLeod said. He started to turn and got three quarters of the way around when the parabeam hit him.

After that, it was almost like watching a melodrama on television. He could watch the action unfold. His sympathies might be directed first one way, then another, but he had no part in the play. He was a statue, standing upright as the snow drifted down and coated him with white. His body-heat didn't escape the insulined jumper to melt it and in a few moments he was an incredibly manlike snowman with a human face. The last thing he wanted to do was stand there, frozen, and watch.

He stood and watched.

Half a dozen figures were clustered close by the white columns at the front of Mayor Spurgess' house. Then, as if they were puppets and all their strings had been pulled at once, they darted behind the columns.

The *World* gunmen were caught in the open and knew it. Parabeams hissed as they fell toward the ground and the snow's protection. Only the shorter, heavier man tried to get up, waddling three or four yards on his knees before a parabeam caught him too and froze him.

Two figures detached themselves from the white columns and ran across the snow toward McLeod, parabeams ready.

"Hey, he looks familiar."

"That's Darius McLeod, stupid. Familiar, the man says. They probably caught him and froze him."

A beam sucked the sleep from McLeod's limbs and he was soon massaging his arms together. After two freezes in as many evenings, he'd really have a parabeam hangover in the morning.

"What about those three people, Mr. McLeod?" the man who had unfroze him asked.

"A natural," the other one said. "Here's our accident. Assault and robbery and accidental death. We even have the assailants. Strip these people of their *World* identification. I'll be right back — with the mayor."

**N**EWSHOUNDS might trick and maim and kill one another, McLeod knew, but never frame other newspapermen for civil crime. You had to keep the public happy with all newspaper people. The police, of course, never investigated very thoroughly these days, since that would be poaching on newspaper territory. They handled traffic very well, though.

There was a commotion in front of the mayor's house, where only one of the gunmen was visible. Presently the door opened. There was loud talking, much pointing.

The gunman's voice was pleading, the mayor's was indignant. Finally, the mayor ducked inside and McLeod hoped he would stay there. Soon he emerged, however, dressed in a jumper. He ran along at the heels of the gunman and neared McLeod just as the other man had finished removing identification cards from the three still figures.

"McLeod, is that you? I knew I could depend on you. You have no idea how much better I'm able to relax now. No, sir. If you said I don't have to worry, I don't have to. What's going on out here? He said you wanted to see me but couldn't move from the spot. Something I can do? What's wrong with them?"

There were not three figures in the snow, but four. "Take a look," the man with Mayor Spurgess said.

The mayor waited for McLeod to answer him, then shrugged and crouched. It was exactly as if he were still under the parabeam, McLeod realized. There was nothing he could say, nothing he could do.

The *Star-Times* gunmen had sized up the situation too well. The three men from the *World* were as good as dead now, which would make it close to impossible for McLeod to turn on the *Star-Times* and expect help from Wain-

wright, even if that were what he wanted. He had better play along.

It was still a show on television and he could only watch. But now he knew the outcome.

The fourth still figure on the snow suddenly erupted into violent motion. A leg snaked out, an arm — the mayor grunted and fell, staring mutely at McLeod, surprised, offended and outrageously indignant the moment before he died. A knife flashed quickly, expertly, gleaming for a split second before it disappeared through the mayor's jumper.

The standing gunman twirled his parabeam to full intensity and sprayed the *World* men with what was now lethal radiation, halting involuntary actions such as blinking — and breathing.

The gunman smiled at McLeod. "Well, you have your story now. We'd better get out of here while you phone for the police.

McLeod had his story, all right. He felt sick. He would call the police and then go write his story about how Mayor Spurgess had chased three unidentified vandals from his house, only to be stabbed to death while protecting his family. McLeod who was visiting the mayor on business, had naturally joined in the chase, in time to overtake and kill the unidentified vandals

but not in time to save His Honor's life.

The police investigation, if any, would fail to uncover anything.

"Thanks a lot," McLeod said.

"Don't mention it." The two gunmen ran to join their companions and soon disappeared through the snow.

In tomorrow's *Star-Times*, McLeod would be a hero.

## CHAPTER VI

"ENOUGH snow for you?" Overman asked jovially as McLeod removed his jumper the next morning in his office at the *Star-Times*. "We're ready to stop it now — because the *World* weather bureau finally owned up to its red face. Thirty-two inches."

McLeod nodded. He'd had trouble reaching the sidewalk through the drifts and more trouble struggling through the few yards of high-piled snow to the *Star-Times* building.

"Rewrite showed me the story you sent in last night, Darius. Wonderful. Someone over at the *World* must be biting his fingernails. They've got to be ready for split second changes in the newspaper business, though. If they don't, they're lost."

"What's that little bit of homely

philosophy leading up to?" McLeod wanted to know. Overman rarely made his point without prefacing it with some mundane generalization. The more important the point, McLeod knew from experience, the triter the generalization.

"We've done a little G-2'ing these last few weeks, Darius." Overman seemed almost on the point of prancing nervously like an anxious racehorse at the starting gate. "I couldn't tell you until it was certain. Harry Crippens is a member of the Anti-Newspaper League." Overman grinned like a yawning owl. "Close your mouth, Darius. Stop gaping. It's the truth."

"But that doesn't make sense, chief." McLeod figured it made very good sense if Overman said so, but he needed time to collect his thoughts.

"Dirty doings at the *Star-Times*," preached Overman. "It's frightening, isn't it? If you can't trust your fellow reporters, just who in the world can you trust? You see, it's not merely Crippens. There's an Anti-News cell here."

"They usually work in pairs, Darius. One to get the information, another to see that editorial policy is not carried out. Don't ask me why they do it. Mis-guided anarchistic tendencies, I suppose. The first

member of the pair very often poses as a turncoat with some other newspaper."

"I don't get you."

"It's simple. That way, he can play two papers against each other and try to make them both wrong. In this case, she can. You see, Crippens' confederate is our number one co-respondent, Tracy Kent," Overman finished melodramatically.

"Tracy! That's incredible." *Don't think*, McLeod told himself. *Don't think and let it show on your face. Just listen.*

"At this moment, the *World* believes Kent is on their payroll. Kent keeps them informed of what's going on over here and draws two salaries. Crippens is her executioner. Crippens, for example, sees to it that Congressman Horner doesn't commit suicide."

TRACY had put two and two together with a blithe ease which had left McLeod wondering. Tracy had seemed to be aware of the alternative which Weaver Wainwright had offered him at the Fourth Estate. But Tracy hadn't balked because she was a loyal member of the *Star-Times* staff. She should have favored the plan, anyway, since it meant saving Crippens' life. But she hadn't fa-

vored it at all.

Because she'd held out hope for McLeod?

"How did you find all that out?" McLeod demanded.

"We suspected someone. We didn't know who. We planted television receivers and let them talk. Darius, I think you know my position. I'm a newspaperman because I think the public is so muddle-headed and mediocre it can't make its own decisions. Democratic governments try to make those decisions and fail because the people play too large a role and mess things up. Totalitarian governments fail because they're too obvious, especially when the guy next door happens to live in a democracy."

"The answer is the obvious evolution of the newspaper to policy-making journalism. People don't associate us with policy-making any more than they think short story writers or television script writers develop schools of psychology. We're both before the fact and after the fact, but they wouldn't believe that if we ran it in banner headlines."

"That's what the Anti-Newspaper League is after. They don't want us to look forward. They don't want us to predict the future and then make it happen. They make inane pronouncements about the essential dignity of man and the

necessity for him to work out his own destiny. They sneer at Ortega y Gasset and deify Tom Paine. They shun authoritarianism in any form and blandly forget that Mr. Average Citizen has always yearned for his little niche in a totalitarian system because he actually wants decisions rained down on him like manna."

"I hate them, Darius. It isn't logical, but I hate them. Between you and me, I would like to strangle them with my bare hands, slowly, forgetting I am a civilized man, forgetting even that we can still use them. But the opportunity is a magnificent one. You could spend all your life G-2'ing after Anti-News people and come up with nothing but wrongos. From now on they'll be playing their little game where I can watch it."

"What about my obituary?" McLeod demanded. "It's the first of the week. I thought you said we were going to substitute Crippens for me."

"I did. I still do. Cripp we will have to sacrifice. But — I apologize in advance, Darius, because I know you won't like this — our G-2'ing was thorough. We received in your apartment, too."

"Don't tell me you can't trust me?"

"Calm down. That's just it, I

## IMAGINATION

can. The cell is spread thin at the *Star-Times*, so thin that we'll have to watch our step until it's uncovered. You see, Darius, you are going to take Crippens' place in it. When Cripp dies Tracy will turn to someone for sympathy. If it looks like you tried to save Cripp because you believed as he did — well, I'm sure you see the possibilities."

**M**CLEOD nodded vaguely. Anti-News. He was playing the game, almost, the way he felt. But he lacked the name. It was strange how you could amble cheerfully through life accepting or ignoring certain things until you woke up one morning and everything looked different. Whoever had decided leopards don't change their spots was all wet.

"... sorry if this sounds cloak-and-daggerish," Overman was saying, "but don't tell anyone. I can trust you. If the conspiracy is as big as I think, the good people at the *World*, the sensible ones, can probably trust a man like Weaver Wainwright. The rest must be suspect."

McLeod grinned. "Why trust me, chief?" he said easily, "I've never been a bug for ideology either way."

"That's precisely why. News-papering is a job with you, but a

good one. You're our highest-paid reporter. You have a reputation to maintain. A man gets muddle-headed if he starts delving too deeply into ideologies. He's afraid to see black-and-white because the other muddle-heads insist there are such things as grays. You follow?"

"Yeah," said McLeod. He followed, all right. It was all right if you thought for yourself, according to Overman, provided you didn't think too hard. You could attend all the high-brow confabs you wanted, safe in the security of your tailor-made answers. Never doubt. Never guess. You know. You just know. This is so and this is not so and there's never any in-between. The insistence on shadings of opinion between truth and error was a stumbling-block in the path of knowledge. Gray was for people who didn't know the truth about black and white.

"Yes, I can trust you. Thank God for that."

"I ought to get a raise," said McLeod, smiling and playing the role Overman had selected for him.

"Very funny. You ought to get a move on. We still have to worry about Wainwright, and his men. There's no telling when they'll strike."

"So I have to strike first, at Crippens."

"Naturally. Have you filled out an application on him?"

"No," McLeod said easily, and raised a hand for silence when Overman was about to start yelling. "It's too important. I want to do the job myself. It's my life we're playing around with."

"I don't know if I approve. There's something to be said for professional efficiency. The gunmen know their work."

"I don't care if you approve or not. It's my life."

"You see, Darius. That's what I like about you. You always know where you stand."

"Thanks. I'll need some security, though."

"Now I don't follow you."

"Some bargaining power. In case I'm not as efficient as your gunmen. The proof that Tracy Kent and Harry Crippens are Anti-Newspaper."

"It's safe."

"I've got to know more about it."

"On the contrary. Simply carry this weapon with you: if there's trouble, have them contact me. Or contact me yourself. But that would ruin everything, Darius. I suppose if you have to bargain for your life, you wouldn't care."

"That's right. I wouldn't."

Overman chuckled. "You're a

good man."

"And one who knows black from white, remember? Let's be honest with each other, chief. You're lying to me. You really figure if I fail, I fail. You wouldn't be willing to bargain in my behalf with what you have, and you know it. If I can kill Crippens and give Wainwright his substitute story and win Miss Kent's confidence, you'd love it. If I can't, you'll try to find another way. Sure, you think I'm good. But you know I'm expendable."

Overman thumped him soundly on the back. "Darius, we should have been brothers. Is there anything else?"

"Yes. How long would you want me to play this Anti-News game?"

"Until we get all the facts."

"Too dangerous," said McLeod. "Unless you make it worth my while."

Overman hadn't stopped grinning. "Maybe you will get a raise, at that."

"Not maybe. Definitely. Twenty per cent."

"Twenty?"

"Twenty."

"All right, Darius. Twenty it is. You'd sell your mother, wouldn't you?"

"Don't have to worry about it. The Anti-Newspaper League hasn't that kind of money. You're safe."

"I knew it," Overman said. "I couldn't have picked a better man."

"I'll keep you informed," said McLeod, and put on his jumper. He walked out congratulating himself on the way he'd convinced Overman.

Only trouble was, he now knew there was more than black and white in the world but wasn't sure he knew what to do about it.

## CHAPTER VII

"I'M sorry," the recorder said when McLeod called Tracy's apartment. "Miss Kent is not at home. Is there any message?"

"No," said McLeod, then lied: "This is Harry Crippens talking."

"Miss Kent left a message for you, Mr. Crippens," said the recorder. "She will wait for you at the Fourth Estate. She says it is important."

"Thank you," said McLeod. "If Miss Kent should check in, will you tell her Darius wants to save Cripp's life if he can? Will you tell her Darius has come to his senses?"

"Darius wants to save Cripp's life if he can. Darius has come to his senses. Yes, sir."

McLeod had left the Star-Times after a hurried lunch in the newspaper cafeteria. He'd placed the call

to Tracy's apartment from his own because the wires might or might not be tapped in his office.

Suddenly he began cursing silently.

Overman had rigged receivers in various apartments — including Darius' — to uncover the Anti-News cell. If Overman had heard his conversation with Tracy's recorder, Weaver Wainwright wouldn't be the only one gunning for McLeod.

He found the receiver rigged to his TV set unhooked it, but the damage had been done. He doubted that Overman would constantly monitor the set, yet Overman would see the damning evidence eventually. McLeod could save Cripp's life by simply not killing him, but then what? He smiled grimly. It posed a considerable problem for Overman too, for the City Editor wanted to dump a fat wrongo in the *World's* lap but now would also want to see McLeod dead. One seemed to preclude the other . . . unless Overman decided to give McLeod a week of grace, then kill him, McLeod was still smiling. Perhaps the situation confronting the fictional lady-or-tiger man had been more aggravating, but it was less deadly.

McLeod taped a second para-beam to his right arm and took the

escalator to the roof and his copter.

"**H**I," the weaponcheck girl greeted him as he entered the Fourth Estate. "How are you today, Mr. McLeod?"

"Never better." As she approached him, McLeod removed the first parabeam from his trick sleeve and handed it to her. "I'm ticklish today," he told her and saw that she was about to say something until she noticed the folded bill wedged between trigger and trigger guard. She nodded, patted his shoulders quickly without searching, and wagged away. It happened all the time, McLeod knew. He wouldn't be the only one.

"You hurry up inside," the weaponcheck girl called over her bare shoulder. "They're doing a combo-tease."

As McLeod made his way through the darkened room, he saw a well-built man and a delightfully built women performing the combo-tease on stage. Sweat glistened on their sleek dark skins as red lights shifted and flowed across the stage. It was more suggestive than French pictures, combining features of an Apache dance and a conventional strip. It had been outlawed everywhere but at the Fourth Estate and had everyone's rapt attention.

Everyone except Cripp and Tracy. McLeod found them in a distant corner of the great room, hunched toward each other across a small table and talking in low tones.

"Mind?" McLeod asked. "You have your nerve," Tracy hissed at him, but people to left and right were muttering angrily at them as the combo-tease neared its conclusion. "Well, I guess you're harmless enough in here."

"Sit down," Cripp said. "Overman knows about you two," McLeod told them quickly. "The works."

"You mean that we're going to get married?" Tracy demanded. "It's no secret."

"I mean that you belong to the Anti-Newspaper League. Tracy, you're pretending to spy on us for the *World*, he knows that, Cripp, you thwart bad news when you can. You both belong to the Anti-Newspaper League. To Overman, you're both anarchistic. He'd like to see you dead."

The woman on stage had seemed spent but now rallied and held her own as they danced a frenzied Apache battle from wing to wing. Tracy, who was facing the stage, said, "That's positively lewd. We've all degenerated so much, Cripp."

McLeod shrugged. "Overman would say that's part of your Anti-News tendencies."

"And you?"

McLeod grinned. "I'm not much for spectator sports."

"No, I mean about the Anti-Newspaper League. I'm not admitting anything, but I just wonder what you think."

"You wouldn't believe me."

"Why don't you try us, Darius?" Cripp suggested.

"You don't have to admit anything," McLeod informed them. "Overman plugged a receiver into your TV sets and monitored them. Mine too, by the way. I called you a while ago. Which put me in hot water, too."

"You mean he'll monitor the call?" asked Cripp.

"Maybe he already has. You can check with your recorder if you want to, Tracy."

"Tell me what you told the recorder?"

"That I was going to try and save Cripp's life. That I had finally come to my senses, I guess."

"All you have to do to save Cripp's life is nothing. I was told by someone on Lantrel's staff that you hadn't applied for Cripp's death."

"Another part of the cell," McLeod mused. "Just how extensive is

it?"

"I wouldn't know," Tracy told him coolly. "Anyway, you said Overman knows."

"He does. I don't."

THE Apache strippers had leaped from the stage and now were cavorting acrobatically about the dance floor. A single red spot followed them as they pounced after each other, working their way toward the rows of tables and then among them. McLeod heard quick, eager breathing in the shadowy audience.

"I never knew they came off the stage," Tracy said.

McLeod winked at her. "Maybe one of these days they'll want audience participation."

"Very funny. If you're telling us the truth, Darius, what are you going to do?"

"You tell me. Overman wanted me to kill Cripp, win your confidence and take Cripp's place in the cell. I had to make it look like it wasn't me who did the job. But if Overman monitored my TV, he'll realize I'm not his boy. He'll have to do without an informant. He knows I'm wise to him but probably doesn't want to know. Which means he'll have to act fast."

"But if he eliminates you, Wainwright and the *World* get their

scoop," Cripp pointed out.

"I know, I can't figure it. Overman's got a man-sized problem, but so have you. I don't think you have much time to leave the city. Get lost somewhere. Change your names. Anything."

Tracy bristled. "We haven't admitted a thing."

"There's no time for that. Please, Tracy," Cripp pleaded. "I think Darius is on our side. We're making a mistake if we reject him."

"Unless I'm wrong," McLeod said, "Overman hasn't told anyone but me. He just doesn't know who to trust."

"So he settles for Mr. Judas Iscariot himself," Tracy said.

Cripp slammed his hand down on the table and drew angry oaths from the tables around them. "Cut it out," he said. "Let's listen to Darius. Can you think of anything else to do?"

"Well —"

"If I'm the only one he told," McLeod went on, "and then if he found out about me and decided to come here in a hurry, we can hope he hasn't told anyone else. Chances are, he hasn't. If he found out he can't even trust me, he won't know which way to turn; not until he clears this whole mess up."

"What are you driving at?"

Tracy asked him.

"Reporter, City Editor. It's close enough. Maybe Wainwright can still get his story."

"You mean Overman? You wouldn't dare."

"It isn't just Cripp's life, or even yours, if you still have your mind made up about me. It's my life too. If we can make Wainwright settle for Overman, all this doesn't have to go any further."

"What's your price?" Tracy demanded.

"For Heaven's sake!" Cripp cried.

"I can't blame her, Cripp. I was pretty nasty about it before, and I tried to be pretty tricky as well. I'm still all mixed up. I think I know where I stand now but I can't guarantee anything."

"You mean after all this is over you're liable to change your mind again?" Tracy asked him, giving Cripp an I-told-you-so smile.

"No. Definitely not. At worst, I'll be neutral. At best —"

"At best," Cripp finished for him enthusiastically, "you'll probably be made City Editor in Overman's place. You're the obvious man for the job, and if you could see your way clear to joining us, there's no telling what we might accomplish. Don't you see it, Tracy?"

"All I can see is the combo-tease."

They'll be dancing on our table if they come any closer."

THE team struggled three tables away to a subtle, wild, barely audible rhythm. The man had regained the offensive, but it had cost him everything he wore except for a pair of tight trousers and one billowing, ruffled sleeve which flapped ridiculously from shoulder to wrist.

At the last moment, McLeod thought he saw a leather strap under the sleeve. The couple had reached their table; the man forced the woman back over it, still dancing. The red spotlight winked out like a snuffed candle flame.

Tracy screamed.

The audience had interpreted the darkness and Tracy's scream as the act's final, breath-taking garnish and now buzzed in isolated knots of whispered excitement before the applause rolled deafeningly across the room.

McLeod leaped to his feet, groping blindly in the darkness with his hands. He heard Cripp shout Tracy's name and began to yell himself for someone to turn on the lights. Something struck his head above and behind the right ear and he felt himself falling to his knees. He grabbed at air, then made contact with two bare legs. Still

yelling, he guessed it was the woman — then felt unseen hands tugging at his hair, fingers raking his face. He got up and was grappling with a supple-swift invisible opponent when the lights went on and blinded him.

There were shouts and restraining arms and when he could see again the woman dancer, now almost naked, was pointing an accusing finger at him. "He deliberately attacked me!" she wailed.

McLeod wiped blood from his face and said, "That's crazy." These were more than combo-stripers, he knew. They might be in Wainwright's pay or Overman's. Either way, he was in for it. "They're a couple of gunmen," he said.

The male dancer was covering Tracy and Cripp with his parabeam, which had been hidden under the flapping right sleeve. "See?" McLeod said to the circle of people around them. "He's armed."

The crowd parted to admit the weaponcheck girl to its center. With a quick, deft movement she found McLeod's second parabeam, withdrew it and told him, "So are you."

More figures joined them, in police uniforms, the polished leather harness for twin parabeams creaking on each pair of hips, the gaudy blue and gold uniforms starched.

stiffly. "You're under arrest," one of them told McLeod. "You'll have to come with us."

"You're no more police than I am. Since when do police do anything more than direct traffic?"

"You'll have to come with us, sir."

"And then get killed trying to escape? Keep your hands off me."

At that moment, Weaver Wainwright made his way inside the wide circle of onlookers, his long sad nose drooping over his upper lip as he smiled at McLeod. "When our police reporter said it was you, I rushed right over."

"Sure," McLeod said bitterly. "Police reporter. Why don't you admit these people are a bunch of your killers? You've really tailor-made your accident this time, Wainwright. I guess I'll be killed trying to escape."

Wainwright regarded him with bland curiosity. "What I want to know is why you attacked the girl."

"He didn't attack her," Tracy said. "I was right here."

"In pitch darkness," the weapon-check girl reminded her. Apparently McLeod's bribe had been topped.

McLEOD let his eyes scan the crowd, seeking a friendly face. Here were the minor luminar-

ies of the fourth estate gazing upon their fallen idol. For McLeod, like Weaver Wainwright, had been almost a legendary figure. But Wainwright had engineered the fall and now, like those South American fish which can strip the flesh from a man in seconds, they clustered about McLeod's social corpse. They sensed his demise as surely as if it had been something physical. They waited with avid eyes at the bottom of the ladder for him to fall. Then each figure would ascend one wrung upward and so, each with his own capable hands and thinkwriter, control human history a little more.

If only he could somehow contact Overman, McLeod thought. How much time did he have? He wasn't sure but thought it could be measured in minutes.

"I'd like to call my City Editor," McLeod said.

Wainwright chuckled. "A good reporter to the last. But I see Crippens and Miss Kent here."

"It's my right."

"The *Star-Times* will get its story. Won't you see to that, Mr. Crippens?"

McLeod stared mutely at Cripp, who finally said, "How do you know I didn't attack the woman?"

The stripper pouted and pointed a manicured finger at McLeod. "It

was that man."

"You see?" Wainwright demanded.

"No," Cripp told him. "It was dark. She couldn't tell. If McLeod is arrested, they'll have to take me, too."

A muscle twitched in Wainwright's face, tugging the long nose down and to the left. "Very well. But Miss Kent still represents the *Star-Times*."

Cripp shook his head. "A correspondent?"

"She's capable."

"Too damned capable," McLeod said. "I have positive proof that Tracy Kent is employed as a spy by the *World*." He turned on Wainwright with what he hoped would pass for righteous indignation. "Is that the kind of fair break you try to give the opposition?"

The encircling crowd stirred, trembling with whispers. McLeod pressed his advantage by jabbing a finger at the captain of police. "I demand the right to call my newspaper."

"Well, I don't know." The man looked to Wainwright for help.

"Never mind him," McLeod said. "You tell me. I'm within my rights as a newspaperman, or wouldn't you know about that?"

Someone brought out a portable phone and thrust it at McLeod. The

captain of police looked at Wainwright, who shook his head quickly from side to side. It was all right. Sure it was all right. McLeod could make no accusations in public, the law said. If he started, he would forfeit his right to complete the call. He could tell Overman that Tracy and Cripp had him, instead, but he doubted if the City Editor would act on that basis.

Wainwright grinned. "There's your phone, McLeod. We're waiting for you to call."

"Thanks a lot," McLeod told him, and hurled the instrument at his face.

He heard a thud and a startled oath and didn't wait to see the results. He whirled and struck out with the edge of his hand, slicing it expertly at the police captain's Adam's Apple. McLeod vaulted over the gagging man as he went down and plunged, head tucked against his chest and knees kicking high, into the first rank of the crowd. He fought elbows, fists, shoulders, legs, warm human breaths, reaching the front of the room and sprinting past the weapon-check arsenal and out into the green, summery glade that surrounded the anachronism of stone and glass that was the Fourth Estate.

PROTECTED by a force field, the grounds around the Estate knew nothing but summer. But elsewhere, McLeod thought as he plunged on toward the copter field, man's control over the elements vied for headlines.

McLeod saw the figure of a man up ahead as he rounded the final turn in the path, still sprinting. The man stood squarely in front of him, blocking his way with a drawn parabeam.

"Did he come this way?" McLeod cried. "Talk, man! Did McLeod come this way?"

"No, sir. He, wait a minute . . ."

But McLeod was upon him, using the same judo-cut that had floored the captain of police. McLeod wrenched the parabeam from the man's fingers as he fell, then found his copter and was airborne by the time the vanguard of his pursuers appeared as tiny dots on the field below.

Less than an hour later, McLeod landed on the roof of the *Star-Times* building, where a slowly circling plow was scooping up the snow, digesting it and spitting out great jets of steam. McLeod doubled the speed of the escalator with his own flying feet and was soon striding across the City Room, nodding briefly to the sychophantic waves and smiles

which greeted him as the *Star-Times'* ace reporter.

"Chief," he said, entering Overman's glass-walled office without bothering to knock, "the wolves are after your fair-haired boy — but good!"

"Wainwright?" Overman guessed, drumming nervous fingers on his desk.

"Wainwright. Something about attacking the female member of a combo tease. If his police ever had a chance to take me, I'd have been killed trying to get away."

"So, what happened?"

"What happened, the man says. They're probably on their way here right now. In order for me to get away, Cripp had to claim he attacked the girl too."

"That's wonderful. Doesn't that take care of Mr. Crippens for us? Well, doesn't it? Incidentally, that was a stroke of genius on your part, telling Tracy Kent you had a change of heart *before* anything happened. Paving the way, eh?"

"Something like that," McLeod mumbled. Then Overman had monitored his call to Tracy's apartment, but had misinterpreted what he heard —

"Sit down, Darius. There. Are you armed?"

"Yes, but you don't think they'd try to take me right here, do you?"

That would be an open declaration of war." McLeod took out the parabeam and placed it on the edge of Overman's desk.

"It would be war — unless I surrendered you to them." Overman scooped up the parabeam and thumbed it to high intensity. "At first I thought that was a stroke of genius on your part, but I wasn't sure. So I had you followed. Your conversation with Crippens and Tracy Kent was ingenius, all right. But it puts us on opposite sides now, doesn't it?"

McLeod had never seen Overman so calm. His fingers no longer drummed their incessant rhythm on the desk, his legs were still. He sat motionless, like a tri-di picture of himself. McLeod said, "Not at all. I only wanted to gain their confidence."

"The one thing that bothers me is this: it looks like I'm going to give Weaver Wainwright his story after all, although there's a chance I can save something for the *Star-Times*. I suspect he'll take you off somewhere and have you killed, but the moment he leaves this office with you, you'll be denounced in the *Star-Times*. Wainwright won't be killing a top reporter. He'll be killing a member of the Anti-Newspaper League."

"You're crazy," McLeod said.

"It might have sounded bad, but it was all part of the same thing. I wanted to gain their confidence and —"

"And offer me in your place to Wainwright's hatchetmen? That's interesting."

"I was lying to them."

"No. You're lying to me. I'll tell you this, Darius. It comes as a great disappointment. Suddenly, all at once, a man finds his organization is riddled with subversives. That's bad enough, but at least he has one man he can trust. He thinks. He thinks, Darius. But he's wrong there, too. Now he can trust no one. Perhaps he'll have to fire his entire staff and start from the beginning again. But it's the one man, the Judas, who hurts most. Even if Wainwright gets you and gets his story — and I get mine — I'll never be able to trust anyone again. Don't you see the position you've put me in? I'm a lonely man, Darius."

McLEOD stood up and leaned across the desk. "We've both been playing God all our lives. What do you think happens when a God loses his worshippers?"

"I haven't lost them. Just the acolytes. There are others."

"There are the people," McLeod said. "Waiting for the medical

cures we promise them but never give. The farmers, praying to their own God while we ruin their crops capriciously to scoop the *World*. The dead citizens of a dozen bombed out cities in a dozen unnecessary wars. The people who haven't read Ortega y Gasset and maybe never even heard of him and can't be convinced they're too stupid to seek their own destinies."

"Ortega was right. Mass man can't discriminate. He's incapable of logical, creative thought. He blunders from catastrophe to catastrophe and grovels at the feet of demagogues."

"He can't be herded and led to slaughter."

"He can't be the master of his own fate, you fool!"

"Perhaps not. But there are people who can create, who can lead. People who pave the way and let the masses follow where they lead."

"What do you think we do? We pave the way. We make the future."

"There's a difference."

"I can't see it."

"You don't want to. The truly creative man merely does his work. The masses will follow of their own free will. Maybe they'll follow the wrong leader as often as not, but we've still come a long way in a few thousand years. It's wrong if

they're led, or pushed, or tricked or —"

"Sit down, Darius. Don't move. The trouble with you anti-news people is you're too romantic. You think because God or Nature created man at the top of the evolutionary ladder, man is good, man can do nothing but move forward in the long run. You think it's a mistake for one man — or a group of men, or an institution — to channel that movement.

"But of all the institutions in man's civilization, the newspaper is the most logical one for the job. We inform, Darius. We are the essence of life. Life perceives and, after perceiving transmits information. Or builds machines to do the job. Sensation, perception, information — the same thing. We're at the top. We belong here."

"Perception should be objective, un-colored. But there's no sense talking to you."

"Perception is never objective, my dear Darius. An individual perceives. Some men are tone-deaf, others color-blind. We all taste the same foods, liking some and disliking others. I say the newspaper belongs on the top like this. I say our creation of news is no different from the hundred varied opinions of a hundred members of the rabble. Unless it's better. We're a cohesive

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force, Darius. We simplify. We unite."

"You hamper and destroy."

"We don't rule by force. Have they ever tried to overthrow us? Have they? You see, they don't dislike us. They have faith in us. They can grow roots and feel secure. They don't have a myriad of possibilities confronting them. They have only two on any given subject, except in purely local situations which we don't consider important. Either the *Star-Times* is right, or the *World* is."

"Why are you telling me all this?"

"It's very important to me. I believed in you, Darius. I still think you've made a mistake. While it's too late now — you see, we can't really control *all* events, can we? — I would like to hear you admit your mistake. I can never trust anyone again."

"If I admit it?"

"I'll thank you . . ."

"And hand me over to Weaver Wainwright?"

"And hand you over to Weaver Wainwright."

**T**HREE was a disturbance outside, the sound of running feet in the City Room, of many voices. Overman cocked his head to one side, listening to the tiny recei-

ver in his ear then picking up his microphone hose and saying, "In a moment. That's right, I said let them in. But give me five minutes." He dropped the hose. "They're here for you, Darius."

"I gathered."

"Would you make a man who once was your friend happy before you go? Just tell me you were wrong. Tell me if you had your way over again you would remain loyal to me even if you were confronted with the same faulty philosophical notions."

"At the point of a parabeam? What good would it do?"

"Forget the parabeam. I'm two people now. I'm guarding you and I'll kill you if you come any closer to me, but I'm also pleading with you. I'm asking you to give me my salvation."

"I wonder which one is stronger," McLeod said, standing again and leaning across the desk. "Why does it mean so much to you, chief? Let me tell you. Is it because you have doubts yourself and want me to resolve them for you?"

"Keep back, I'm warning you. That isn't it at all. You've made me lose my faith in people."

"I thought you didn't have any."

"In a few people. Please, Darius. Don't come any closer. A man has to trust someone."

"You can't do anything about your doubts. You're hoping I can."

"I'm going to kill you if you come any closer." Overman was still standing like a statue, the parabeam an extention of his right hand. It was as if he would never move again unless McLeod freed him with a word. It was as if the heart too had stopped its beating and only the lips were alive, the pleading lips, begging for a reprieve.

McLeod leaped across the desk, his middle slamming down on the hard surface, his diaphram squeezing all the air from his lungs. His fingers closed on Overman's wrist and forced it back as the parabeam hissed from his cheek.

Now the lips were still. Now the muscles which had remained so inert for many moments were writhing with activity, each individual cell adding its strength to the whole, to the wiry arms, the thin legs, the twisting, heaving torso. The only sound was the harsh rasping of Overman's breath as they grappled, tumbling over and over, rolling across the floor.

The parabeam was between them, separating their chests. Overman butted with his head, bit, gouged, used his knees and elbows while he held the weapon. The lungs filled with air — McLeod

could feel the torso lifting, the ribcage expanding. The mouth opened to scream for help . . .

McLeod got a hand over it, felt teeth clamp on his fingers, very white, very sharp. The mouth opened again as McLeod rolled suddenly clear to avoid an up-thrusting knee.

Knee hit elbow and hand tightened convulsively. The parabeam hissed against Overman's chest and up, bathing his chin and face and the lips which, instead of screaming, formed the words "tell me" and then closed slowly. Afterwards, McLeod always thought Overman's ears must have retained their sentience longest as the man died, waiting for an answer which would never come.

The door opened. People stood around, looking down at them. Wainwright. The phony police. Tracy and Cripp. Some *Star-Times* security agents.

McLeod stood up slowly, his own muscles twitching. He looked at Wainwright, then pointed to Overman's body on the floor and said, "There's your story. You were modest in your prediction. Not a reporter, but the City Editor. Dead. And listen to me, Wainwright. It's the only story you'll ever get. Try anything else and there'll be open war between our

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papers. You understand?"

Wainwright considered, head down, arms folded in front of him, long nose hiding lips from that angle. "They'll probably make you City Editor," he mused. "I'll take the story. You're in the clear, McLeod."

"I want to be exonerated from that false charge."

But Wainwright shook his head. "Do it yourself. You have a newspaper, too. Incidentally, how did Overman die?"

"Say he was looking for something, something important — so important that when he couldn't find it he killed himself."

"That's no story."

"It's a story," said McLeod, "We can make it a story."

**T**HREE are hundreds of us," Tracy said later. "All over the country. All over the world. We're badly organized. We need organization. You're in a position to give it to us."

"Not overtly," Cripp warned. "But under cover at the beginning, until we build up strength. We'll have to re indoctrinate young reporters and then forget about indoctrination when we can. We'll be fighting a war all our lives."

"Men like Overman and Wainwright are the alternatives," Mc-

Leod said. "I think even Overman knew, at the end, that he was wrong. But it went against everything he ever thought or believed. I almost could have been another Overman."

"You're not," Tracy said. "You just had to be goosed."

"It's going to be interesting," McLeod told them. "We'll still predict. To stay in business, we'll have to predict, at least to start with. But we'll give our scientists and social workers a free hand, and our predictions will all be practical. Do you realize there hasn't been a substantial scientific discovery put to use in the last fifty years?"

Cripp seemed worried. "Their approach is more sensational. They'll draw the readers. But we have to — to stay in business."

"That was your trouble all along," McLeod said. "You were a bunch of snipers. I think you're wrong. What's not sensational about a trip to the moon or a cure for cancer or controlled weather that actually helps the farmers or campaigning for the better man in an election because he truly has something to offer? We're liable to put the *World* right out of business."

"We can try," said Tracy, smiling.

"Not you, young lady. No more co-respondents. How would you like to be a bona fide social worker?"

But Tracy squeezed Cripp's hand and said, "No, thank you. I'd rather be a housewife."

McLeod thought he'd have to settle for loving both of them like a brother — then realized he'd be too busy to do anything of the sort.

THE END

## ★ Ceramic-Jacketed Metals ★

Rocket designers, jet engine technicians, and gas turbine scientists are limited so frequently by the melting points of the special alloy they use. In fact, this more than anything hampers the spread of the highly efficient gas turbine. Fortunately, a solution to this problem seems in the offing.

By coating conventional steels and alloys with a thin layer of ceramic, such as porcelain, they are enabled to resist oxidation and erosion by

hot gases, so well in fact, that most new engine-makers use this technique. Methods are being found of bonding ceramics to metals so well that they are fused together into what amounts to a new material. The greatest problem has been matching the obviously different coefficients of expansion of the metal and the ceramic. Success is being attained here too. Jet engines are becoming literally "flying sinks."



"What's going on around here — how about some service!"

# Space Gamble

by

Mack Reynolds

**A year-long voyage bought you a ticket to space madness; Hillman knew this when he signed on. The pay was high — but did it match the risk?**

*Space cafard: The fear of free fall; the terror of the blackness, the unholy blackness of space; the claustrophobia, the screaming, horrible, maddening necessity to escape the confines of the metal shell encompassing you—to breathe fresh air—to see a familiar sun above you—to feel good earth beneath your feet. Space cafard . . .*

**C**OMMANDER Hillman, just how do you go about ordering men to commit suicide?" SupCom Groff Underwood asked.

Hillman shifted his two hundred pounds, said, low in his throat, "Never been in that position, sir."

The SupCom looked down at his hands, seeing their age. "That's not exactly it, anyway. It's not a matter of ordering. The mission is voluntary."

There was nothing to say to that. Hillman looked at the supreme commander of Earth's space fleet. He was old and thin and outwardly showed few of the characteristics that had brought him to his position of authority.

The SupCom went on. "This project doesn't make sense to me. I doubt if it will to you. We both take orders, however." He twisted his mouth. "Once or twice I've even volunteered—but that was a long time ago."

There was nothing to say to that, either.

"The government has a new bug in its bonnet, Commander," the SupCom continued. "They are looking beyond Luna, Mars and Venus. They've decided that we should begin to put feelers out in the direction of the Jupiter satellites, to begin preliminary explor-



ation."

"Possibly in another fifty years we'll have the equipment," Hillman said. "Then . . ."

The SupCom smiled his twisted smile again. "My sentiments exactly, Commander. But the Department of Space has requested that a survey of Io, Ganymede and Callisto be made to determine whether or not colonization is possible."

Fred Hillman rubbed a hand over his jowl as though checking on his morning shave. "How do they expect to get there?"

"They expect to take the largest freighter in the fleet and redesign it so that its interior is completely stripped of all non-essentials, even including crew quarters, and filled instead with fuel tanks and supplementary propulsion units."

"Stripped of crew's quarters, sir?"

The SupCom nodded. "Sufficient room would be left for a crew of four. No more."

"And how long do they think the trip would take?"

"Approximately a year, Commander."

Hillman shook his head emphatically. "Four men'd never make it. Possibly twenty, given ample living quarters, but four would be down wih space cafard in two or three months."

"Let me finish. The Department

has decided that four is the absolute maximum and minimum. A larger number, with greater recreational facilities would be preferable, but the space can't be afforded. To reach the acceleration necessary to make the journey every cubic foot of available area must be used for fuel."

Hillman growled. "I take it I'm being asked to volunteer for this fantastic junket?"

The SupCom nodded.

"And the other three?"

"Your ship's officers, Lieutenants Marsh and Works and your engineer, Macfarlane. The fact that you've been a team for seven years, without friction, seems an indication of compatibility."

Fred Hillman came to his feet, his heavy face dark. "No," he said. "Not four men in crowded quarters for a year. Space cafard . . ."

The SupCom interrupted softly. "How old are you, Commander?"

"Forty-two. Far beyond retirement age and . . ."

Groff Underwood held up a hand. "You are senior skipper of the fleet, one of the reasons for your selection. Past retirement age, but, like so many, taxes being what they are, you can't quite make it. You continue on."

The commander's face reflected his bitterness.

The SupCom said, "The Department is offering a bonus of fifty

thousand credits, tax free, to the men who participate."

Air whistled through Hillman's teeth. "Fifty . . . thousand . . ."

"Tax free, Commander," Groff Underwood repeated, looking down at his old thin hands. "That interests you, eh?"

"That interest me *very* much."

FIRST Officer Willard Marsh's angular face was peevish. He tossed aside the onion skin, agate type book he had been reading and looked at the others seated about the tiny wardroom.

"Boys," he said, "we've made a mistake. Three months out and we've already read and reread all the books, seen the films a hundred times, played the games until we can't stand the sight of them—nor of each other. Nine more months to go!"

Dalton Works, ship's navigator, said sourly, "Now that you mention it, I *can't* stand the sight of you any more. I'll match you to see which one of us goes to his quarters."

Marsh's eyes narrowed, but before he could snarl an answer, Commander Hillman chuckled throatily. "There's no gambling allowed in space, gentlemen. Matching is gambling."

Bob Macfarlane, the engineer, said, "Let's play some game. If we don't do something, I personally,

figure on going into cafard right this minute."

Dalton Works said, "Hand us down that copy of *A Thousand And One Games*, Willard." He added, not very hopefully, "Maybe we'll find something new."

"Hah!" Marsh grunted, but he reached to the shelf above him, secured the book and tossed it over.

Macfarlane said, "There should be *something*."

Works flicked through the pages. "Tennis," he said.

"Hah!" Marsh repeated bitterly.

"Blackjack," Works read. "It's played with cards."

"We tried that already," Macfarlane reminded him. "No fun unless you have stakes."

"Monopoly."

"That's pronounced monotony," Marsh growled. "Instead of warding off cafard, we'd all be raving with it in six hours."

"Keep looking," Commander Hillman said. "You'll find something."

"Poker," Dalton Works read. "We ever play poker?"

"Another one of those games that isn't fun unless you bet," Macfarlane said. "My old man used to play it when he was a kid."

"Well, why not?" Commander Hillman said suddenly.

Willard Marsh looked up. "You know better than that, skipper."

One of the strictest rules in the book. No gambling in space."

Fred Hillman rubbed a beefy hand down the side of his face. "I don't know," he said. "This isn't an ordinary trip. As far as I'm concerned anything to break the monotony is worth trying."

"Makes sense, at that," Macfarlane said. "What'dya say, boys?"

Hillman said, "Nobody'll know but we four, anyway. It's all right with me."

Willard Marsh said stiffly, "I'll stay out."

Works said, "Somebody get the cards. Let's see these rules now."

Commander Hillman slid his chair closer to the table. "What'll we use for counters? You know, chips?"

"I got some titanium washers in the engine room," Macfarlane said.

"I'll get them," Marsh said. "I'm not playing, but you go on ahead."

He brought the improvised chips back from the engine room and watched enviously as the others began playing the new game.

"There's two ways of playing," Works said from his book. "Stud and draw. Let's say we learn draw first."

Commander Hillman had assumed charge of the bank and had sold all chips to the extent of their pocket credit units. "Draw it is," he said.

Works won the first hand with

a pair of eights, and Macfarlane the second with three jacks and the third with two queens.

"This is the life," he said. "Come on, skipper, deal those cards."

"Listen," Willard Marsh said suddenly, "let me in on this next round, eh?"

"Make way for the gentleman," Dalton Works said, edging his chair to one side. "His money is as welcome to me as the next man's."

**I**N spite of initial success, Dalton Works was the first to go broke. The chubby ship's navigator, after accumulating chips to the point where he had to sell stacks of them back to the bank so that the game could continue, saw them melt away until he found himself without any of the funds he'd had at the time of blast-off. Which hadn't been much, of course.

He sat on the side-lines, still interested enough to watch even though he couldn't play.

The second day he could bear it no longer. "Look," he said to the easy-going Macfarlane, "how about lending me a credit?"

The engineer didn't look up from his cards. "What'd you pay me back with, Dalton? You've lost all your credits."

Works scowled at him. "I'll pay you back when the trip's over."

"Sorry," Macfarlane told him. "I'd rather have it now."

"Old gambling adage," Hillman said. "Never play against your own money."

"You mean you wouldn't lend me anything either, skipper?"

Hillman didn't say anything.

Dalton Works, miffed, retreated to the far end of the wardroom, picked up a book and tried to read. He threw it down in disgust.

Marsh snorted, "I haven't had a decent card in hours."

Commander Hillman raked the pot in, began riffling the cards in a quick shuffle. He said, "I think we ought to make a ruling that we can play only, say, eight hours out of the twenty-four. Otherwise, we'll get tired of the game and be as bored as before we began."

"Oh, no," Macfarlane protested.

"I think the skipper is right," Marsh said, "Makes sense."

Dalton Works was on his feet again. "Listen, Bob," he said. "that watch of mine you like. I'll sell it to you for two credits."

Macfarlane looked up in surprise. "Sure thing," he said.

While Dalton Works was going through his two credits, Marsh went broke and sold his silver mounted stun gun to Commander Hillman who had wanted the weapon for some time but hadn't been able to talk his first officer out of it.

And the play went on.

It went on eight hours a day. Between sessions they growled at

each other, and particularly at the skipper for limiting the time at the table.

Duties were few, in fact almost non-existent at this stage of the cruise. As the ship hurtled through space at an unprecedeted speed, automatic pilots, automatic fuel feed, even automatic ship's galley, took care of the various tasks. They gave up even the pretense of standing watch and ship's discipline became increasingly lax.

Stakes increased. They located a supply of aluminum washers, gave them a value of five times that of the titanium ones, and the play went on.

It narrowed down finally to Commander Hillman and Willard Marsh who between them had managed to corner all credit units and all the personal belongings of Dalton Works and Macfarlane.

While Macfarlane and Works watched, in irritation, the two remaining contestants see-sawed back and forth, neither gaining.

Finally Works could stand it no longer. "Listen," he snapped to Marsh, "lend me ten credits and I'll give you a note for them."

Marsh frowned. "I thought we'd decided not to lend money."

The navigator was insistent. "I've got fifty thousand credits coming to me as soon as we get back to New Albuquerque. My note is as good as cash. What's the

difference?"

Marsh looked up at the ship's commander. "What do you think?"

Commander Hillman put down his cards and considered the matter. "It'd be desirable to have them back in the game. Make it more interesting."

Works hustled his plump body to a desk for paper and stylus. "Here's a note for ten credits."

"Give me that stylus," Macfarlane demanded. "Here's my note for ten, skipper. Let's have some chips."

The play went on in mounting enthusiasm. In two weeks the one credit limit was lifted to five. By that time Commander Hillman was a thousand credits ahead of the game and Willard Marsh nearly two thousand.

The arrival at Jupiter came almost as a surprise to them. Six months of their scheduled year had already passed. They were over the hump.

They spent a busy week checking the larger of the gigantic planet's nine satellites, accumulating evidence that Callisto, at least, and possibly Ganymede, might be suitable for colonization. Their survey was necessarily sketchy since they were without facilities for landing, but the Department of Space was going to be well satisfied.

At the end of the week they

headed back toward their home planet, accelerating rapidly.

And resumed their cards.

FIRST Officer Willard Marsh entered the small cubicle that served as office, ship's hospital and living quarters of Commander Hillman. It was about the size of a Pullman bedroom, two bunks, one above the other, a swivel chair, a tiny desk, a medical chest built into the wall, a small closet, a lavatory.

Hillman's heavy body was sprawled on the bottom bunk. When Marsh entered, he marked his place with a forefinger, turned his book over on its side, so that Marsh couldn't read the title.

"Hello, Willard, sit down." He narrowed his eyes at the other.

Marsh slumped into the chair wearily. He said, "Skipper, we've got another six months to go. Are we going to make it?"

Hillman said carefully, "I didn't expect to last this long."

"Neither did I. I lay it principally to the gambling. It's kept us going so far. Something to ward off the cafard."

Commander Hillman recited, "Monotony times boredom times confined space times an extended period equals space cafard."

"And we have all the factors except boredom. How long will it be before we're bored with gamb-

ling, skipper?"

Hillman ran a beefy hand over his face. "I don't know," he said. He hesitated before adding, "I'm beginning to see preliminary signs of cafard in all of you and probably have them myself."

"Me too?" Marsh's mouth was a thin line.

"That slight tic in your cheek, Willard."

The first officer's eyes went flat. "Which one of us is in the worse shape so far?"

"Macfarlane, I'm afraid. He's on the quiet, easy-going side. Nice boy, Bob, but I think he'll crack first."

Marsh repressed a shudder. "It doesn't make much difference who's first. Let it hit one of us and it'd go through the ship like a forest fire."

He wrenched his mind away from the subject, seized on something else to talk about. "What're you reading there, skipper?"

"Oh, nothing."

Marsh was interested. "Book looks a little different from the others in the library. Don't think I've seen it."

Commander Hillman said uneasily, "Just a book I brought along as part of my personal weight allowance."

"Well, what's it about? If it's readable I'd like to borrow it." Marsh reached over suddenly and

plucked it from the other's hand.

Hillman got up on one elbow, his face protesting, then sank back again.

Willard Marsh read aloud, "*How To Win At Poker.*"

A voice from the door said, "Now that's a handy little book to have."

It was Dalton Works who had come up unnoticed but in time to hear the last words of the conversation.

Marsh, a heavy red creeping up his neck, was reading chapter heads. "*Percentages With and Without The Joker. Psychology of The Bluff.*" He looked up at his commanding officer. "Yes, this would be very handy to have around against a group of greenhorns."

He turned to Dalton Works. "You'd better get Macfarlane. Let's meet in the wardroom."

"See here," Hillman snapped. "I'm captain of this vessel."

They turned their backs on him and left.

THE four of them gathered about the wardroom table. Bob Macfarlane was mystified. Hillman sat expressionless.

Marsh said, "Does anyone remember which of us first suggested gambling on this cruise?"

Bob Macfarlane said, "The skipper okayed breaking the rule

because of the peculiar circumstances of this trip. You remember." March tossed the book to the table. "Peculiar is right. Peculiar that the skipper chose this in his personal weight allowance."

Macfarlane looked at the volume and his face went sick. "Gee, skipper," he protested, his voice so low as hardly to be heard.

Marsh said, "How far are you ahead of the game, Hilman?"

Commander Hillman looked at them defiantly. "About five thousand credits ahead."

Works whistled. "I didn't know we'd gone that far."

Bob Macfarlane's voice was almost apologetic. "Everybody's always known you were tight with credits, skipper. But taking advantage of us like this . . ."

Hillman's face had gone gray.

Marsh said. "Well, gentlemen, this ends our gambling in space."

"Hey, wait a minute," Works said heatedly. "I'm three thousand credits short. How about that?"

"We can cancel the notes we've been signing. They seem rather meaningless under the circumstances."

"Hold it there," Macfarlane protested. "I'm a thousand credits to the good. I'm not tearing up any notes. Maybe the captain stole a march on us with his book, but I didn't. I won fair and square."

Commander Hillman snapped, "I have no intention of tearing up your notes. We played in good faith. The fact that by coincidence I had a book on the subject does not alter the fact that you gentlemen are in debt to me."

"Coincidence," Willard Marsh laughed. "Hah!"

Dalton Works said, without looking at his skipper, "My debt still stands. Any notes I signed, I'm good for."

Bob Macfarlane said, "Let's all have an equal chance to study this book, learn all the percentages and so forth, then everybody'll have a chance to win their money back."

Marsh said, "No. Further gambling is out."

The others were against him.

Finally Commander Hillman said heavily, "Mr. Marsh, I am commander of this ship. I agree with Mr. Works and Mr. Macfarlane. We shall continue the play. It has gone too far to stop now."

Fury was in Willard Marsh's angular face. "Very well, but I demand this matter be listed in the ship's log, and I, of course, shall refrain from further playing."

"Let's see that damn book," Dalton Works said.

**F**IRST Officer Willard Marsh held out for nearly a week and then, wordlessly, bought into the

game again.

Fortunes varied. For a time Commander Hillman lost consistently until he had gone through his winnings and began writing notes himself. In a period of two weeks he had dug down to the point of nearly twenty thousand credits.

It was Bob Macfarlane who broke through the curtain of silence that surrounded Hillman in regard to all except ship duties.

After raking in a particularly large pot, he said softly, "Skipper, why don't you call it quits? These credits mean a good deal to you. Your retirement and everything."

Commander Hillman managed a smile. "Thanks, Bob," he said.

But he didn't drop out. An hour later he wrote another note for a thousand, buying chips from Dalton Works who was currently riding high. Works was worried too. He said, "None of the rest of us have got more than five thousand behind, skipper. You're letting this get under your skin."

Hillman said, "Whose deal is it?"

It was another two weeks later that Marsh threw his cards to the table and pushed his chair back in disgust. "I think I'll wander around a little. Drop out of a few hands."

"Yeah, sure," Works said, yawning. "I'm beginning to get tired of poker myself." He began

shuffling.

Marsh drifted from the wardroom, hands in pockets, his tall body slouched.

Commander Hillman looked after him.

Macfarlane said, "What's the matter, skipper?"

"Marsh has been depressed lately. I'm afraid its cafard."

Macfarlane licked suddenly dry lips. "You checked him lately?"

Commander Hillman's smile was wry. "I'm afraid none of you gentlemen have had a medical check since . . . well, for some time."

There was an embarrassing silence. Works dealt a round. "Queen high," he said. "Your bet, skipper."

Macfarlane said, "We ought to make a point of having the skipper check us every twenty-four hours. Personal antagonisms shouldn't have anything to do with the proper running of the ship."

"It's okay with me," Works said. "You know, we ought to have some chip of higher denomination. Since we've been betting higher it gets clumsy pushing all these chips around."

Willard Marsh said from the doorway. "We ought to do something about the chips, that's for certain. I've just been in the engine room."

They looked up at him.

He bit out, "How many of the aluminum disks did we put into the play as chips?"

Macfarlane answered him. "A hundred and fifty. There were about two hundred in the engine room. We took most of them."

Simultaneously, those at the table understood. Eyes went from one pile to another. There were more than a hundred and fifty on the table, that was obvious.

And simultaneously the eyes went to Commander Hillman whose face darkened angrily. "Look here," he snapped, "I'm banker, the only one who wouldn't profit by such a trick."

There was a lengthy silence finally broken by Willard Marsh. "So we have a deliberate crook among us!"

Works said uncomfortably. "It's only a few hundred credits . . ."

"Several month's pay," Marsh injected.

"...and that's not much considering the way we've been wagering lately," Works finished stubbornly.

Marsh slumped into the chair he had deserted ten minutes earlier. "If anything," he bit out, "it makes the whole thing more interesting."

"What do you mean by that?" Hillman growled.

His first officer began to stack his chips carefully. "I mean that

between the four of us there is nearly a quarter of a million credits at stake. And each of us wants it all."

"We four have been shipmates for a long time, Willard," Bob Macfarlane said softly.

"Ummm," Marsh admitted, still fingering his chips. "However, this is our last cruise together. The one or two men who finally win will be able to retire in wealth, but the losers will go on shipping out with damn little chance of ever retiring, taxes being what they are."

Hillman said, in quiet agreement, "The stakes are high, boys."

"So, high," Marsh said, "that our years together are making no difference to at least two of us. The skipper here is willing to take advantage by making an advanced study of the game. One of the rest of us is crooked enough to put in chips he hadn't bought!"

Dalton Works muttered, "All we have to find now is that somebody is cheating on the deal!"

"No reason to believe, under the circumstances, that someone isn't," Hillman said. "The pot's right. How about another card, dealer?"

**THEY** played silently now, a coolness settled over them.

Each had his ups and downs, and, seemingly, it was impossible

to eliminate anyone from the game.

At one point, Works found himself forty thousand credits in debt, almost the entire amount of his bonus. He remained at that point for days, then slowly began climbing out of the hole, regaining his notes, building up a backlog.

Hillman rewon what he had lost.

Marsh was spectacular in his gains and losses. At one point he had more than seventy-five thousand credits before him. Again, he sank ten thousand in debt.

Macfarlane played carefully and hovered a few thousand credits ahead, seldom having runs of either good or bad luck.

There were occasional outbursts of temper, an occasional accusation. At one point, Marsh and Works came to blows, to be quickly separated by their fellows and ordered by Hillman to refrain from playing for twenty-four hours. Their common indignation against the skipper brought them together during their absence from the game and that friction was patched over.

As they drew nearer to Earth and the time for play lessened, the game grew steadily more feverish. Stakes, unlimited in size, grew stiffer and pots of as much as five thousand credits were not uncommon.

Those losing, played despera-

ly to regain their losses, beads of sweat on their brows at the thought of missing this one great chance of escaping the economic pressures of the age. Those ahead played carefully, coldly, knowing the stakes to be life-long security.

Not long before their destination was reached, and during a period between games, First Officer Willard Marsh entered the captain's quarters and closed the door behind him.

Hillman, reclining on his bunk, book in hand, looked up. "Something I can do for you, Marsh?"

The First Officer sank into the swivel chair and looked at the other without speaking.

"It's not often you drop into my quarters anymore, except for your regular cafard check," Hillman said.

"As a matter of fact," Marsh said, "I was here only an hour ago."

"Oh? So that's where you went in the middle of the game."

"That's right. I was looking for something, Hillman."

The skipper said nothing, frowned at the other.

Marsh relaxed in the chair, looking up at the overhead. He felt emotionally and physically tired. "It came from something Works said. His suggestion that any of us might be cheating. I checked."

"Checked?"

"That's right. The last chapter of that book of yours was devoted, as you know, to methods of detecting card sharps."

"I read it," Hillman said. "I've detected no cheating."

Marsh allowed himself a self-deprecating chuckle. "To think I used to rank you as my best friend." He shook his head, then went on. "I doubt if any of the others have detected it either. But one of the popular methods of cheating in the old days was the use of markings that are detectable only by those wearing a special type of spectacles."

"I see," Hillman said.

"It seemed a rather remote possibility especially since glasses are no longer worn due to progress in eye therapy. However, I took the cards and checked them with some improvised equipment and was able to discover that our decks are quite thoroughly marked."

"I didn't expect that discovery to be made," Hillman said.

Marsh held up a hand which contained a small suction disk. "If I am correct, this device that I found among your effects is used for placing contact lenses under a person's eyelids."

Hillman said nothing.

"How far are you ahead of the game, Commander?"

"Possibly five hundred credits."

"I suppose you were waiting for

the final moment for a spectacular killing. The way betting is going, you could have won every credit on board in a matter of a few hours."

Commander Hillman remained quiet.

Marsh came to his feet, his face free of expression. "I don't expect you to participate in the games further."

"Very well," Hillman said grudgingly.

The lanky ship's officer turned to go. "You realize that I shall report this upon landing."

"That's up to you," Hillman said.

THEY landed at the New Albuquerque spaceport to an unprecedented ovation. The crowds burst barriers and swarmed out over the tarmac toward the huge craft and its small crew.

SupCom Groff Underwood had to be sped through in a land-jeep to stay ahead of the cheering throngs and to arrive at the foot of the ship in time to be first to greet the returning heroes, one by one.

Ship's Engineer, Rober Macfarlane. A firm handclasp. "Congratulations, son."

"Thank you, sir."

Ship's Navigator Dalton Works. A firm handshake. "Your name is already history, my boy."

"Thanks, sir. A great honor to have participated."

First Officer Willard Marsh. A firm handclasp. "A rugged trip, eh, Lieutenant?"

"We made it, sir. I don't know how."

The Supreme Commander of the Space Forces turned to Hillman, put both hands on his shoulders and looked into his eyes. "I made no mistake in you, Fred. One year in space in restricted quarters and only four men. And not one touch of space cafard by the looks of you. Incredible! How did you manage, Commander?"

Hillman's heavy face broke into a tired grin. "It wasn't easy, sir."

The SupCom reached down, secured the other's hand and pumped it. "Easy! Of course not. Tell me, did you use that scheme you told me about? You know, the gambling, the marked cards and everything? Getting them into a poker spree, accusing each other of

cheating, keeping their minds from the monotony?"

Commander Fred Hillman looked at his startled shipmates with a wry grin. "I believe I did, sir."

The SupCom nodded understandingly as he took in the shock of the other three. His eyes laughing, he said, "Gentlemen, you know the ban against gambling in space. Any losses or winnings you had on this cruise, I order cancelled."

Hillman stared squarely at his crew. "I won't blame any of you for hating me. I played a pretty low trick on all of you. But the fact remains we did get back to Earth as healthy, sane men..."

Works, Macfarlane, and Marsh looked at one another. There was a tense silence. Then suddenly, as a unit they laughed. It was Marsh who stepped forward and touched Hillman on the shoulder. "Come on, skipper, we've got some unfinished business. The government owes each of us fifty thousand credits—and that's a gamble we all won!"

THE END

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## **IMAGINATIVE TALES**

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**Henig was sent to obtain a soil sample of the planet. It was a routine assignment, but not necessarily the only method for discovering an-**

# Export Commodity

*by*

*Irving Cox, Jr.*

**T**hree of the hairless bipeds stood in front of the frame building talking. Concealed by the brush beyond the road, Henig studied them carefully. These were the dominant species on this primitive world, unspeakably grotesque things. The pale, white skinned animals had a culture of sorts—their language, their buildings, their wheeled-vehicles testified to that—but an animal society was very different from the rational civilization Henig knew.

He was naked and he carried no weapons. That was the logic of the computers. But Henig was a Fleet Lieutenant, not one of the scientists. He put his faith in arms rather than computer logic. Stripped of his weapons, he lost a fundamental part of himself. The computers had said he would be safe, but too many things could go wrong. Too many factors might

have been left out of the observer data submitted to the machines.

Henig inched cautiously toward the three white things standing near the wooden structure. The telecommunicator, which the surgeons had planted in his skull, caught the sound of alien voices and made a conceptual translation in terms Henig understood. He could have used the same device to communicate directly with the alien minds, but the Scientist-General had warned him against that.

"The hairless bipeds," he told Henig, "are only an animal species. They have no civilization. Make no mistake about that, Lieutenant."

"And if we decide we need their planet, sir—"

"We'll set up reservations for them, so they can't interfere with our operation."



"They won't have weapons to match ours," Henig suggested hopefully.

"If you go in uniform, Lieutenant, even these witless things would recognize you as an alien. It would be foolish to let them know we exist, until we have the final report on your physical survey."

"Sir, are we actually sure—"

"You're questioning the computer logic?" The Scientist-General was very amused.

"Not that, sir. It's just—you see, I'm a solider, and I don't understand these things."

"You'll have to take our conclusion on faith, Lieutenant. You're the only individual of your particular species aboard, and it would be absurd for us to wait for the center to send out a scientist with your physical qualifications. This planet is too insignificant for us to waste that much time on the survey. The chemistry of the atmosphere and the pressure of gravity approximate what you're accustomed to on your home world, Lieutenant Henig. And the co-incidence of your appearance is the best disguise you could have."

"Sir, isn't it true that some-

times on these primitive worlds, the animal species war against each other? Wouldn't I be likely to get involved?"

"The computers say no. And we can't argue against mechanical logic, can we, Lieutenant?"

Naturally the scientists relied on their data, Henig thought bitterly; but they weren't making the observation—they weren't standing naked and unarmed on an alien world. The miniature recorders sent down by the ship were only machines; after all, without a logical sense of judgment. The Lieutenant had experienced alien worlds before. Facts were all very well, but the unpredictable quality of emotion was something else again. How could a recorder make note of that? How could feeling be measured or tabulated by the computers?

The Lieutenant lay in the brush listening to the talk of the three hairless aliens. It was surprisingly trivial, the sort of thing he might have heard on his home world: the rising price of food in the city; the cost of fuel for their wheeled vehicles; obscure references to politics; an amusing remark about the female of the species. The similarity to what he knew gave Henig confidence.

HE slid out of his hiding place and moved toward the three

bipeds. This was the ultimate test. If the computers had been right; the Lieutenant would pass them unnoticed.

He was nearly across the road when the alien things saw him. They fell silent and backed away from him. He saw terror in their faces a split-second before one of them—a female—began to scream. The second male turned and fled into the trees. The other drew out a cylindrical tube which was a weapon. Henig tried to read the emotion in their minds, but the only comprehensible thought the tele-communicator picked up was a paralyzing horror.

Henig sprang at the hairless biped who had the weapon, clawing the ugly, white face. The female screamed again and beat at him with her forepaws. The weapon exploded as the male went down, his face a torn, beaten pulp. Henig felt the hot pain of the metal pellet lodged in the flesh of his shoulder. In panic he fled beyond the frame building...

And the Scientist-General had said he would be safe,—without weapons, without the protection of his uniform! The logic of civilization didn't apply on a primitive world of animal emotions.

Henig expected pursuit, but he heard no footsteps behind him. He stopped running and crept back toward the wooden building. The

pain of his shoulder wound spread numbly into the rest of his body. His nerves seethed with nausea. Blood oozed from the torn flesh, congealing on his naked chest.

He saw the female bend over the animal which had tried to kill him. Her mate, Henig guessed. Logically she should have fled, since Henig was still nearby; even a primitive would have been aware of the danger. But she seemed more concerned for the male. She wiped the blood from his face tenderly and began to drag him toward a four-wheeled vehicle, which stood idle inside the frame building.

The Lieutenant admired her courage. To risk herself so futilely in order to help another of her species: entirely illogical—no civilized being would be so foolish—yet heroic and noble. Henig hated himself for what he had to do. Yet he had no alternative. He couldn't let either of them escape to give the alarm.

He sprang at the female. She screamed once as he clawed her throat. The blood pulsed through the wound, and she died quickly. Henig was glad he could finish it so mercifully, with so little pain. He took a rock and beat in the skull of the male.

The Lieutenant stood beside the frame building, blood dripping from his hands, and looked across

the road toward the brush-covered hillside where he had hidden his landing shuttle. It was safe, protected by a refraction field which made the metal tube visually transparent.

Henig had to make a decision; but pain pounding in his wounded shoulder made logical thinking difficult. He could return to the ship now and try to make the scientists understand that the computers had been wrong; his physical appearance was not disguise enough on this unknown world. Or he could complete his survey. With luck, that would be finished before dawn. The test area was relatively close to the hills where he had brought down his shuttle.

Yet he knew he had no real choice. His experience with the three hairless bipeds — granting that the scientists accepted all of it at face value — was not data enough to outweigh the facts which the mechanical observers had previously fed to the computers. This would be considered an isolated episode, not a basis for a hypothetical generalization. The computer logic would strip Henig of his rank and brand him a coward. He had worked too hard for his Lieutenantcy to give it up so easily; he had to go through with his assignment.

He hid the bodies of the two animals he had killed behind the

## IMAGINATION

frame building. The third one, which had escaped, might spread the alarm, but Henig had no way of preventing that; it was a risk he had to take.

He examined the four-wheeled vehicle which was inside the building. It was a relatively primitive mechanism powered by an internal combustion engine. The fact that the native vehicle was one Henig could drive more than counterbalanced the potential risk from the white-faced animal which had escaped. With any luck, he could have his survey done in half the time he had estimated.

The fuel from the alien vehicle gave Henig part of the answer he needed. The mechanical observers had already used it for fuel, it must have been here in recoverable quantities. The Lieutenant needed only to take one sample from the test area for the scientists to determine whether or not the oil was worth the expense of exploiting the planet.

HENIG fingered the dash, looking for the ignition. The lettered symbols over the various dials meant nothing to him, since his telecommunicator was capable only of translating spoken words. The Lieutenant turned one dial and sound blared out at him. Music of a sort: this primitive, animal culture had been clever enough to

discover a process for radio transmission.

For a second time the Lieutenant found himself unconsciously admiring the hairless bipeds. As inventions go, the internal combustion engine and radio were relatively insignificant. Yet this animal world had developed its technology without outside help and that suggested a brilliant science. Henig's empire had a vastly superior technology, but the scientists drew upon the ingenuity and inventive skill of a hundred united worlds and they had the tool of the logic computers.

Far more characteristic of a primitive world was the ignition lock. An animal society, trapped by uncontrolled emotion, would have no mutual trust. Their machines would have to be locked against theft. That was the emotional environment Henig had expected.

But then he thought of the female who had stuck by her mate, when it meant her own death. One jarring note, one violation of the predictable pattern: the more he considered it, the more it disturbed him. Was it typical of the way they all behaved?

The Lieutenant began to envy the illogic that made such affection possible. He thought of the mates he had been assigned from time to time by the psychological

services. None of them, in a similar situation, would have tried to help him. Personal heroics were not a part of the computer civilization. He was suddenly conscious of the loneliness and the emptiness of scientific logic. These people—these pale, white-faced animals—had something better.

And that thought was heresy. In haste Henig broke the ignition lock and twisted the loose wires together so he could start the motor. The seat was designed for the bipeds, and it was most uncomfortable for him to drive the car. Fortunately he had only a short distance to go. The oil field selected for the test area was in the foothills, on the outskirts of the city.

The traffic was heavier as he approached the field, but it was nearly dark by that time and no one seemed to notice the Lieutenant slumped low behind the wheel of the stolen vehicle. Had the computers been right, he wondered? Did he resemble an animal species which lived at peace among the aliens? In that case, what accounted for the reaction of the three hairless things when they first saw him?

He had left the radio going, listening to the weird discord of the savage music. Sometimes a voice sang the melody and his telecommunicator gave him a conceptual analysis of the words. All the

lyrics revolved around one theme: personal affection. Love was apparently the dominant trend of this culture. According to their music, they died for it, sighed for it, cried for it; no sacrifice was too great if it were made in the name of love.

Henig saw nothing trite in the wording. His logical mind limited his understanding to a strictly literal translation. He knew that an animal society was built upon emotion, but he had never before come across a primitive world where the focal point was love. Hate, greed, ambition, conflict, envy: those were typical and normal. The emphasis upon affection put this world in a special category.

The white-faced bipeds had discovered a bond stronger than all the logic of the empire. Because he was logical, the Lieutenant had to admit that to himself. If the empire came to exploit the oil resources, it would destroy something magnificent.

But Henig wasn't sure. He had too little specific data: the courage of one female, the chanted songs of a radio program. And, of course, the lonely isolation of the logical life he lived. But to throw that in as a factor was to argue emotionally—on an animal level—himself.

As he turned down a side road into the oil field, the program of

music ended and Henig heard a brief news summary. It was predominantly a report of a developing war. Now that made sense. That was the sort of emotional behavior Henig expected from an animal world. But how could they sing love chants while they simultaneously prepared to slaughter each other?

At the end of the broadcast the newscaster mentioned the discovery of two brutally mutilated bodies behind a mountain garage. "An alleged eye-witness is held by the police. He claims to have seen a strange animal approach the victims shortly before the murder." The announcer repeated a very accurate description of Henig—which, he said, tallied with no species known to zoology.

To Henig that statement was incomprehensible. The computers couldn't be that wrong. They were objective, logical machines, processing the information submitted by the mechanical observers. The computers said Henig resembled a native species. That much had to be true. The conclusion that he would be able to pass unnoticed on the alien planet might be faulty for lack of emotional data. But the newscaster claimed no such species existed!

The Lieutenant hid his vehicle in a copse of trees close to the de-

serted side road. He slid off the seat, glad to escape the cramped position behind the wheel. As he walked toward the oil field, his wound began to pain him again. With his tongue he worked the small capsule loose from the back of his mouth—the only place where he could conceal it, since the computers had decreed that he come naked to this world.

He stooped beside a sump and watched the black earth filter slowly through the membrane ifitò the capsule. In his own mind Henig had no doubt that the petroleum resources here were economically worth exploitation. He thought, for a moment, of the brutal occupation by the empire fleet—the slaughter and the destruction, before the survivors could be herded into prison reservations.

The killing and the burning of their primitive cities didn't disturb him. The aliens were animals. Because of their biological evolution, they would never achieve a higher social level. They were eternally tied to emotion, and a logical civilization was beyond their mentality. To wipe them out meant no more to Henig than the extermination of a germ colony or a nest of vermin.

Still the particular emotion dominating these bipeds was unique. It was worth preserving—if that emotion actually existed; if he

were reading the data correctly. The Lieutenant still didn't know; he still couldn't make up his mind.

The test earth seeped slowly into the capsule. Henig raised his eyes and studied the field. It was dark and the skeletal shafts of the oil derricks were silhouetted against the glow of the city lights. The hairless bipeds had developed the field extensively. Two or three generations ago, Henig thought enviously, the planet must have been enormously rich in oil if, after so much native exploitation, it was still worth an empire invasion.

Two galactic millennia had passed since the empire had reached that same period in technological growth, depleting the petroleum resources of a hundred worlds. The empire had to have oil. Not for fuel—atomic energy had been harnessed long ago—but for lubrication. All the scientists, all the logical computers which governed the empire, had never come up with a satisfactory substitute.

The sample capsule was full. Henig stood up, sealing the vial again at the back of his mouth. And as he turned toward the road, he saw one of the aliens watching him. Behind the biped a pipe was burning gas exhausted from the field. The flame lit the animal face and Henig saw the crushing weight of terror.

The animal turned and ran,

blowing on a whistle which was suspended around its neck. Henig sprang after him and caught the white thing with a blow that split the fragile neck bone. But one blast on the alarm whistle had been enough. Henig saw other animals pouring out of the low-roofed, stone building nestled among the oil derricks. Bright lights blazed up, sweeping the field with a deadly glare.

**H**ENIG ran toward the trees where he had hidden his vehicle. He saw the lights of other cars on the side road; and he heard the nervous scream of sirens. He swung aside, running in the direction of the suburban cottages in the foothills. Unless he found another vehicle unguarded, he had to return to the shuttle on foot; and that would give the aliens too much time to spread the alarm.

As he crossed the main highway, he saw two bipeds walking together, arm in arm. The female began to scream. Henig had to silence her. He sprang for her throat; without his customary weapons, that was the only self-defense he had. The male should have turned and fled, since he was not armed. That was sensible and that was logical.

But once more the Lieutenant tangled with the unique emotional reactions of this planet. The male

held his ground and tried to protect the female. Henig's first slash missed her throat and she fought back, too. The male's forepaw, doubled into a hammer-shape, struck Henig's wounded shoulder, and blood oozed down his naked chest again.

A nausea of pain sapped Henig's strength. He staggered toward the shadows beyond the road. If the two aliens came after him now, he was lost; he was too weak to defend himself. He collapsed, panting and retching.

But he heard no footsteps. When he was able, he looked back toward the road. He saw the male holding the female in his arms and mopping blood from the gash Henig had torn in her cheek.

These inexplicable aliens and their affection for each other! It defied all logic and reason. Their behavior was absurd; yet somehow sublime, too. From the arid emptiness of his logical mind, Henig, for a moment, had a vision of something great: a new world which fused the intellect of the computer civilization and the warmth of this animal emotion. These ugly, white-faced animals had a resource far more valuable than petroleum to export to the empire.

Then he heard the sirens coming closer and he began to run. He saw a brightly lighted street, where

bipeds crowded the walks. He turned in panic down a dark alley. The sirens were behind him. He saw savages at both ends of the alley, and he pushed his way blindly into a dark warehouse.

He fell across a pile of sacks filled with a soft, grainy substance. A narrow shaft of moonlight made a sharp angle on the floor. He tried to examine his wound in the light. It was still bleeding; the skin was puffy and inflamed. A kind of dull haze crowded the periphery of his mind. The Lieutenant knew the symptoms; he had been wounded twice before when the fleet occupied primitive worlds. He would be all right when he reached the shuttle. He had an emergency kit there and he could sterilize the wound.

He heard footsteps and muffled voices in the alley. He shrank closer to the sacks; unconsciously he clawed a rent in the cloth and the grain spilled out, making a tiny pyramid in the moonlight.

There was a scurrying of tiny feet, a shrill squeal, and a rodent came from the darkness to nibble at the food. It was the smallest rat Henig had even seen; no larger than his hand. Instinctively his mouth began to water. The rat would make a tasty delicate morsel, and it was a long time since he had eaten. But before he could pounce on it, another animal shot

out of the shadows and caught the rat in its claws.

Then Henig knew the truth. He knew why the computers had been wrong and he knew what data the mechanical observers had failed to transmit. For the small animal, which was torturing the rat with its forepaws, was a physical duplicate of himself—in miniature. No wonder the radio newscaster had said this world had no zoological species like Henig's! It was a question of relative size and the error might have amused him—if he had been safely back aboard the exploration ship.

Henig was aware of minor physical differences. The small, green-eyed miniature of himself did not walk erect. Its bare feet had not yet evolved the necessary alteration in joint structure. And its claws were still only cutting tools, incapable of more delicate manipulation. Tentatively Henig used the telecommunicator to explore the animal mind; he found no indication of a cerebral cortex.

But the animal apparently felt the transmission, for it arched its back and every hair on its body stood on end. It dropped the rat and swung toward Henig, hissing and spitting into the darkness. The Lieutenant grinned and purred; this little creature was like a newborn child, lying in the family nest. It was the first familiar

thing he had found on this alien world of hairless bipeds.

But his purring frightened the animal. It dropped its rat and fled, screaming. The sound brought the feet running back to the alley door. Henig heard the pounding fists beating upon the wooden panels. He clawed his way to the top of the pile of sacks, where he saw a window. As he broke it open, the door gave and the hairless animals tumbled into the darkness.

A WEAPON flashed and a metal pellet split the wood close to Henig's head. He leaped through the window. The jar, when he landed, sent pain spiraling through his body. He staggered along a dark street. Behind him he heard footsteps and hysterical voices. He couldn't outrun them; he knew that. When he saw a garden gate, he pushed it open. He fell exhausted into a bed of blooming flowers. He didn't quite lose consciousness. He heard the animals when they ran past the garden gate.

In the sullen silence he began to breathe more easily. The terrified pounding of his heart slowed. He tried to push himself to his feet, and he found that his arm below the shoulder wound was paralyzed with pain.

He turned on his back — and

rolled against the legs of a female who stood above him, looking straight ahead toward the street. He waited for her to scream and call the others. Instead she said, in a whisper,

"Poor thing! You're hurt."

Henig's mind soared with hope. Was it possible that the love these animals felt for each other could be extended to include himself?

She knelt beside him, gently feeling his wound with her hairless fingers. Her head was still erect. She did not look at him. He winced when she touched him. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'll have to put something on it for you."

She went very slowly to a dilapidated garden shed. She moved by shuffling her feet along the gravel walk, occasionally reaching out to brush her hands against the larger shrubs growing beside the path. When she returned she poured a liquid over Henig's wound. The new pain was like fire, but he knew she had used a primitive remedy to burn out the infection. There was no doubt in his mind after that. While some of her species searched the streets for him and tried to kill him, she was ready to give him help.

Although the Scientist-General had warned Henig against it, he decided to use the telecommunicator. If she would help him, he had a chance of getting back to his

shuttle. It was the only way he could escape. He took one risk in using the device: the female might become aware of every concept in Henig's mind. But that was a small risk. Only an intellectual equal, with the heightened preceptions of the computer civilization, would read the full context of his communication.

"I need help," he conveyed to her. "I have a place of safety in the mountains; will you take me to it?"

With a sudden, indrawn breath —like the hissing of a small child —the female stiffened beside him. Had he frightened her? He tried to explore her mind, but her cerebral pattern was amazingly complex. He couldn't evaluate the interlocked emotion—shock, sorrow, a sympathetic loneliness, and finally understanding. How much of his thinking—how much of himself—she had seen, he did not know. Her rational logic was subordinate to the emotion. Her most surprising reaction was pity.

Pity for him because of the computer civilization that had shaped his mind!

"Of course you must go back," she said. So she had dredged that much out of his mind during the brief openness of the telecommunication. "And you—you have found a resource that your unfortunate people need."

The petroleum? Did she understand about that, too? Then why would she help him escape, since it meant the invasion and destruction of her world?

She told him she would persuade her brother to drive his truck up the mountain road. She had learned from the telecommunication where Henig wanted to stop. "You'll be hidden in back. Open the door and slip out when we stop. It won't be far to your shuttle." So she had understood that, too. Henig realized he had grossly underestimated the mental abilities of these emotional animals.

Very gently she put a salve and a bandage on his wound. She helped him into a small, panel truck which was sheltered in a frame building open to the street. Before she closed the door she handed him a package of nut meats.

"This will help you—with your other problem: Give them to your scientists. We call these nuts peanuts. They make an excellent oil. You may have the soil on one of your worlds to grow them for yourselves; if not, we might be able to produce the oil for you."

She closed the door. Henig felt a tight constriction in his throat. This hairless female had read every thought in his mind; there was no question of that. And she was letting him go home un-

harmed; she was helping him escape. To Henig this was the final demonstration of the emotion of her species, the quality of love that the computer civilization had never found.

He would not let her world be invaded and exploited. The oil resources were not that important. Very carefully he removed the sample capsule from his mouth and emptied it. With his unhurt arm he clawed loose dirt together from the floor of the truck and pushed it through the membrane. When the scientists analyzed that sample, they would leave her world in peace.

The motor hummed and the truck began to move. In the darkness Henig opened the package of peanuts and crushed one between his teeth. As a food it was very unpalatable. Perhaps the hairless bipeds enjoyed it—from her mind the telecommunicator had picked up the fact that they looked upon it as a food—but nothing like this was of any value to the empire. The various species in the computer civilization were not vegetable eaters.

Henig was sure the nut was not a source of oil. The female, of course, had underestimated his mentality, just as he had misjudged hers. The purpose of her gift was forlornly obvious. She

## IMAGINATION

wanted to buy off the invasion she had read in his mind, and presumably the nutmeat was their favorite food which they produced in quantity. The Lieutenant grinned over her emotional foolishness.

Her world needed no subterfuge to protect it. The bipeds had something better—they would be safe. Henig would make sure of that.

After a time the truck came to a stop. Henig opened the rear door and dropped to the road. He recognized the garage where he had killed the two aliens that afternoon. He knew where he was.

The Lieutenant leaned for a moment against the open truck door, adjusting to the new pain in his wound. In the front of the vehicle, he saw the girl and her brother. A pale light from the dash fell on their faces. Henig saw the girl's eyes for the first time, and he realized suddenly that she was blind!

No wonder she had helped him, then. She hadn't known he was an alien. That accounted, too, for her quick understanding of his telecommunication; sightlessness had heightened her other perceptions.

The radio in the truck was on. The girl and her brother were listening to a newscast reporting the diplomatic maneuvers of something referred to as the cold war.

Impatiently the blind female snapped off the broadcast.

Henig heard her say softly, "Have you ever wondered, Fred, what another race might think of us?"

"They'd call us fools, I suppose. We have the ability to build so much, but instead we're using our science to destroy ourselves."

"But you know, Fred, I don't think that would seem important to an outsider. Perhaps he wouldn't even be aware of the conflict. Simply because we're human beings, Fred, we have something far more significant. We have it because men and women have to live together, because—"

"Love?" Her brother laughed. "We take that for granted."

"It's a pity we can't see ourselves—just once—as strangers might. We would be able to understand our own greatness, then."

But Henig didn't know that, for he wasn't conscious of how much of a change the impact of love had made in himself. He was thinking about the last mate the psychological services had assigned him. He wanted to see her again. He wanted to see her litter of young, hissing and purring, in the family nest. It was the first time in his life he had felt the need to go back, and the feeling was a factor no computer could measure. He would have clawed the throat of

any scientist who told him such thinking was illogical, for Henig had found what he considered to be the higher logic of emotion.

Silently Henig scurried through the forest toward his shuttle, carrying with him a useless sample of dust fastened at the back of his

mouth—and an idea that would one day overthrow his computer civilization. An emotion marked for export, from an anthropoid world.

The exportable commodity of man.

THE END

## INTRODUCING the AUTHOR

★ *Irving Cox, Jr.* ★

(Concluded from Page 2)

technique gave me my first interest in writing science-fiction, for it is in science-fiction where the semanticist may speak with the art of words; and it is the reader of science-fiction who is most likely to understand and appreciate the objectives of the semanticist.

Since 1946 I have been teaching in Long Beach — every grade level in the secondary school, from the seventh through the first two years of the city college. At the present time I teach sociology on the college level, and history-English to the eighth grade. These are the children who have been born since the Second World War began; these are the children who have never known a world at peace. Yet they are a generation basically no different from any other. They have, like all children always, the

bright light of the stars in their eyes; they still look upon tomorrow with hope instead of foreboding; they are still able to dream great dreams.

And it is their effervescence, their rambunctuous curiosity, their bubbling, noisy friendliness for all things and all people, which inspires me to write. My first science-fiction short was published in 1952; I have since that time appeared periodically in all the major science-fiction magazines. I have also written some short detective fiction and I may one day try some longer historical fiction.

To round out the record, I am married and I have a child of ten — who is sometimes one of the most biting critics of what I write!

—*Irving Cox, Jr.*

# The Chromium Fence

by

*Philip K. Dick*

**Walsh wasn't rebelling against society; he simply felt that a man should be allowed to think for himself—without the aid of a robot!**

EARTH tilted toward six o'clock, the work-day almost over. Commute discs rose in dense swarms and billowed away from the industrial zone toward the surrounding residential rings. Like nocturnal moths, the thick clouds of discs darkened the evening sky. Silent, weightless, they whisked their passengers toward home and waiting families, hot meals and bed.

Don Walsh was the third man on his disc; he completed the load. As he dropped his coin in the slot the carpet rose impatiently. Walsh settled gratefully against the invisible safety-rail and unrolled the evening newspaper. Across from him the other two commuters were doing the same.

## HORNEY AMENDMENT STIRS UP FIGHT

Walsh reflected on the significance of the headline. He lowered the paper from the steady windcurrents and perused the next column.

HUGE TURNOUT EXPECTED MONDAY ENTIRE PLANET TO GO TO POLLS

On the back of the single sheet was the day's scandal:

WIFE MURDERS HUSBAND OVER POLITICAL TIFF

And an item that made strange chills move up and down his spine. He had seen it crop up repeatedly, but it always made him feel uncomfortable.

PURIST MOB LYNCHES NATURALIST IN BOSTON WINDOWS SMASHED—GREAT DAMAGE DONE  
And in the next column:

NATURALIST MOB LYNCHES PURIST IN CHICAGO BUILDINGS BURNED—GREAT DAMAGE DONE

Across from Walsh, one of his companions was beginning to



mumble aloud. He was a big heavy-set man, middle-aged, with red hair and beer-swollen features. Suddenly he wadded up his newspaper and hurled it from the disc. "They'll never pass it!" he shouted. "They won't get away with it!"

Walsh buried his nose in his

paper and desperately ignored the man. It was happening again, the thing he dreaded every hour of the day. A political argument. The other commuter had lowered his newspaper; briefly, he eyed the red-haired man and then continued reading.

The red-haired man addressed Walsh. "You signed the Butte Petition?" He yanked a metalfoil tablet from his pocket and pushed it in Walsh's face. "Don't be afraid to put down your name for liberty."

Walsh clutched his newspaper and peered frantically over the side of the disc. The Detroit residential units were spinning by; he was almost home. "Sorry," he muttered. "Thanks, no thanks."

"Leave him alone," the other commuter said to the red-haired man. "Can't you see he doesn't want to sign it?"

"Mind your own business." The red-haired man moved close to Walsh, the tablet extended belligerently. "Look, friend. You know what it'll mean to you and yours if this thing gets passed? You think you'll be safe? Wake up, friend. When the Horney Amendment comes in, freedom and liberty go out."

The other commuter quietly put his newspaper away. He was slim, well-dressed, a gray-haired cosmopolitan. He removed his glasses and said, "You smell like a Naturalist, to me."

**T**HE red-haired man studied his opponent. He noticed the wide plutonium ring on the slender man's hand; a jaw-breaking band of heavy metal. "What are

you?" the red-haired man muttered, "a sissy-kissing Purist? Agh." He made a disgusted spitting motion and returned to Walsh. "Look, friend, you know what these Purists are after. They want to make us degenerates. They'll turn us into a race of women. If God made the universe the way it is, it's good enough for me. They're going against God when they go against nature. This planet was built up by red-blooded *men*, who were proud of their bodies, proud of the way they looked and smelled." He tapped his own heavy chest. "By God, I'm proud of the way I smell!"

Walsh stalled desperately. "I —" he muttered. "No, I can't sign it." "You already signed?"

"No."

Suspicion settled over the red-haired man's beefy features. "You mean you're *for* the Horney Amendment?" His thick voice rose wrathfully. "You want to see an end to the natural order of —"

"This is where I get off," Walsh interrupted; he hurriedly yanked the stop-cord of the disc. It swept down toward the magnetic grapple at the end of his unit-section, a row of white squares set across the green and brown hillside.

"Wait a minute, friend." The red-haired man reached ominously for Walsh's sleeve, as the disc slid to a halt on the flat surface of the grapple. Surface cars were parked

in rows; wives waiting to cart their husbands home. "I don't like your attitude. You afraid to stand up and be counted? You ashamed to be a part of your race? By God, if you're not man enough to —"

The lean, gray haired man smashed him with his plutonium ring, and the grip on Walsh's sleeve loosened. The petition clattered to the ground and the two of them fought furiously, silently.

Walsh pushed aside the safety-rail and jumped from the disc, down the three steps of the grapple and onto the ashes and cinders of the parking lot. In the gloom of early evening he could make out his wife's car; Betty sat watching the dashboard tv, oblivious of him and the silent struggle between the red-haired Naturalist and the gray-haired Purist.

"Beast," the gray-haired man gasped, as he straightened up. "Stinking animal!"

The red-haired man lay semi-conscious against the safety-rail. "God damn — lily!" he grunted.

The gray-haired man pressed the release, and the disc rose above Walsh and on its way. Walsh waved gratefully. "Thanks," he called up. "I appreciate that."

"Not at all," the gray-haired man answered cheerfully examining a broken tooth. His voice dwindled, as the disc gained altitude. "Always glad to help out a fellow

..." The final word came drifting to Walsh's ears. "...A fellow Purist."

"I'm not!" Walsh shouted futilely. "I'm not a Purist and I'm not a Naturalist! You hear me?"

Nobody heard him.

"I'M not," Walsh repeated monotonously, as he sat at the dinner table spooning up creamed corn, potatoes, and rib steak. "I'm not a Purist and I'm not a Naturalist. Why do I have to be one or the other? Isn't there any place for a man who has his *own* opinion?"

"Eat your food, dear," Betty murmured.

Through the thin walls of the bright little dining room came the echoing clink of other families eating, other conversations in progress. The tinny blare of tv sets. The purr of stoves and freezers and air conditioners and wall-heaters. Across from Walsh his brother-in-law Carl was gulping down a second plateful of steaming food. Beside him, Walsh's fifteen year old son Jimmy was scanning a paper-bound edition of *Finnegans Wake* he had bought in the downramp store that supplied the self-contained housing unit.

"Don't read at the table," Walsh said angrily to his son.

Jimmy glanced up. "Don't kid me. I know the unit rules; that one sure as hell isn't listed. And any-

how, I have to get this read before I leave."

"Where are you going tonight, dear?" Betty asked.

"Official party business," Jimmy answered obliquely. "I can't tell you any more than that."

Walsh concentrated on his food and tried to brake the tirade of thoughts screaming through his mind. "On the way home from work," he said, "there was a fight."

Jimmy was interested. "Who won?"

"The Purist."

A glow of pride slowly covered the boy's face; he was a sergeant in the Purist Youth League. "Dad, you ought to get moving. Sign up now and you'll be eligible to vote next Monday."

"I'm going to vote."

"Not unless you're a member of one of the two parties."

It was true. Walsh gazed unhappily past his son, into the days that lay ahead. He saw himself involved in endless wretched situations like the one today; sometimes it would be Naturalists who attacked him, and other times (like last week) it would be enraged Purists.

"You know," his brother-in-law said, "you're helping the Purists by just sitting around here doing nothing." He belched contentedly and pushed his empty plate away. "You're what we class as unconsci-

ously pro-Purist." He glared at Jimmy. "You little squirt! If you were legal age I'd take you out and whale the tar out of you."

"Please," Betty sighed. "No quarreling about politics at the table. Let's have peace and quiet, for a change. I'll certainly be glad when the election is over."

Carl and Jimmy glared at each other and continued eating warily. "You should eat in the kitchen—" Jimmy said to him. "Under the stove. That's where you belong. Look at you — there's sweat all over you." A nasty sneer interrupted his eating. "When we get the Amendment passed, you better get rid of that, if you don't want to get hauled off to jail."

Carl flushed. "You creeps won't get it passed." But his gruff voice lacked conviction. The Naturalists were scared; Purists had control of the Federal Council. If the election moved in their favor it was really possible the legislation to compel forced observation of the five-point Purist code might get on the books. "Nobody is going to remove my sweat glands," Carl muttered. "Nobody is going to make me submit to breath-control and teeth-whitening and hair-restorer. It's part of life to get dirty and bald and fat and old."

"Is it true?" Betty asked her husband. "Are you really unconsciously pro-Purist?"

Don Walsh savagely speared a remnant of rib steak. "Because I don't join either party I'm called unconsciously pro-Purist and unconsciously pro-Naturalist. I claim they balance. If I'm everybody's enemy then I'm nobody's enemy." He added, "Or friend."

"You Naturalists have nothing to offer the future," Jimmy said to Carl. "What can you give the youth of the planet — like me? Caves and raw meat and a bestial existence. You're anti-civilization."

"Slogans," Carl retorted.

"You want to carry us back to a primitive existence, away from social integration." Jimmy waved an excited skinny finger in his uncle's face. "You're thalamically oriented!"

"I'll break your head," Carl snarled, half out of his chair. "You Purist squirts have no respect for your elders."

Jimmy giggled shrilly. "I'd like to see you try. It's five years in prison for striking a minor. Go ahead — hit me."

Don Walsh got heavily to his feet and left the dining room.

"Where are you going?" Betty called peevishly after him. "You're not through eating."

"The future belongs to youth," Jimmy was informing Carl. "And the youth of the planet is firmly Purist. You don't have a chance; the Purist revolution is coming."

Don Walsh left the apartment and wandered down the common corridor toward the ramp. Closed doors extended in rows on both sides of him. Noise and light and activity radiated around him, the close presence of families and domestic interaction. He pushed past a boy and girl making love in the dark shadows and reached the ramp. For a moment he halted, then abruptly he moved forward and descended to the lowest level of the unit.

THE level was deserted and cool and slightly moist. Above him the sounds of people had faded to dull echoes against the concrete ceiling. Conscious of his sudden plunge into isolation and silence he advanced thoughtfully between the dark grocery and dry goods stores, past the beauty shop and the liquor store, past the laundry and medical supply store, past the dentist and physical doctor, to the ante-room of the unit analyst.

He could see the analyst within the inner chamber. It sat immobile and silent, in the dark shadows of evening. Nobody was consulting it; the analyst was turned off. Walsh hesitated, then crossed the check-frame of the ante-room and knocked on the transparent inner door. The presence of his body closed relays and switches; abruptly the lights of the inner office winked on

and the analyst itself sat up, smiled and half-rose to its feet.

"Don," it called heartily. "Come on in and sit down."

He entered and wearily seated himself. "I thought maybe I could talk to you, Charley," he said.

"Sure, Don." The robot leaned forward to see the clock on its wide mahogany desk. "But, isn't it dinner time?"

"Yes," Walsh admitted. "I'm not hungry. Charley, you know what we were talking about last time . . . you remember what I was saying. You remember what's been bothering me."

"Sure, Don." The robot settled back in its swivel chair, rested its almost-convincing elbows on the desk, and regarded its patient kindly. "How's it been going, the last couple of days?"

"Not so good. Charley, I've got to do something. You can help me; you're not biased." He appealed to the quasi-human face of metal and plastic. "You can see this undistorted, Charley. *How Can I join one of the parties?* All their slogans and propaganda, it seems so damn — silly. How the hell can I get excited about clean teeth and underarm odor? People kill each other over these trifles . . . it doesn't make sense. There's going to be suicidal civil war, if that Amendment passes, and I'm supposed to join one side or the other."

Charley nodded. "I have the picture, Don."

"Am I supposed to go out and knock some fellow over the head because he does or doesn't smell? Some man I never saw before? I won't do it. I refuse. Why can't they let me alone? Why can't I have my own opinions? Why do I have to get in on this — insanity?"

The analyst smiled tolerantly. "That's a little harsh, Don. You're out of phase with your society, you know. So the cultural climate and mores seem a trifle unconvincing to you. But this is your society; you have to live in it. You can't withdraw."

Walsh forced his hands to relax. "Here's what I think: Any man who wants to smell should be allowed to smell. Any man who doesn't want to smell should go and get his glands removed. What's the matter with that?"

"Don, you're avoiding the issue." The robot's voice was calm, dispassionate. "What you're saying is that neither side is right. And that's foolish, isn't it? One side must be right."

"Why?"

"Because the two sides exhaust the practical possibilities. Your position isn't really a position . . . it's a sort of description. You see, Don, you have a psychological inability to come to grips with an issue. You don't want to commit

yourself for fear you'll lose your freedom and individuality. You're sort of an intellectual virgin; you want to stay pure."

Walsh reflected. "I want," he said, "to keep my integrity."

"You're not an isolated individual, Don. You're a part of society . . . ideas don't exist in a vacuum."

"I have a right to hold my own ideas."

"No, Don," the robot answered gently. "They're not your ideas; you didn't create them. You can't turn them on and off when you feel like it. They operate through you . . . they're conditionings deposited by your environment. What you believe is a reflection of certain social forces and pressures. In your case the two mutually-exclusive social trends have produced a sort of stalemate. You're at war with yourself . . . you can't decide which side to join because elements of both exist in you." The robot nodded wisely. "But you've got to make a decision. You've got to resolve this conflict and act. You can't remain a spectator . . . you've got to be a participant. Nobody can be a spectator to life . . . and this is life."

"You mean there's no other world but this business about sweat and teeth and hair?"

"Logically, there are other societies. But this is the one you were born into. This is your society . . . the only one you will ever have."

You either live in it, or you don't live."

Walsh got to his feet. "In other words, I have to make the adjustment. Something has to give, and it's got to be me."

"Afraid so, Don. It would be silly to expect everybody else to adjust to you, wouldn't it? Three and a half billion people would have to change just to please Don Walsh. You see, Don, you're not quite out of your infantile-selfish stage. You haven't quite got to the point of facing reality." The robot smiled. "But you will."

Walsh started moodily from the office. "I'll think it over."

"It's for your own good, Don."

At the door, Walsh turned to say something more. But the robot had clicked off; it was fading into darkness and silence, elbows still resting on the desk. The dimming overhead lights caught something he hadn't noticed before. The power-cord that was the robot's umbilicus had a white-plastic tag wired to it. In the semi-gloom he could make out the printed words.

#### PROPERTY OF THE FEDERAL COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC USE ONLY

The robot, like everything else in the multi-family unit, was supplied by the controlling institutions of society. The analyst was a creature of the state, a bureaucrat with a desk and job. Its function was to

equate people like Don Walsh with the world as it was.

But if he didn't listen to the unit analyst, who was he supposed to listen to? Where else could he go?

**T**HREE days later the election took place. The glaring headline told him nothing he didn't already know; his office had buzzed with the news all day. He put the paper away in his coat pocket and didn't examine it until he got home.

#### PURISTS WIN BY LAND-SLIDE HORNEY AMENDMENT CERTAIN TO PASS

Walsh lay back wearily in his chair. In the kitchen Betty was briskly preparing dinner. The pleasant clink of dishes and the warm odor of cooking food drifted through the bright little apartment.

"The Purists won," Walsh said, when Betty appeared with an armload of silver and cups. "It's all over."

"Jimmy will be happy," Betty answered vaguely. "I wonder if Carl will be home in time for dinner." She calculated silently. "Maybe I ought to run down ramp for some more coffee."

"Don't you understand?" Walsh demanded. "It's happened! The Purists have complete power!"

"I understand," Betty answered peevishly. "You don't have to shout. Did you sign that petition

thing? That Butte Petition the Naturalists have been circulating?" "No."

"Thank God. I didn't think so; you never sign anything anybody brings around." She lingered at the kitchen door. "I hope Carl has sense enough to do something. I never did like him sitting around guzzling beer and smelling like a pig in summer."

The door of the apartment opened and Carl hurried in, flushed and scowling. "Don't fix dinner for me, Betty. I'll be at an emergency party meeting." He glanced briefly at Walsh. "Now are you satisfied? If you'd put your back to the wheel, maybe this wouldn't have happened."

"How soon will they get the Amendment passed?" Walsh asked.

Carl bellowed with nervous laughter. "They've already passed it." He grabbed up an armload of papers from his desk and stuffed them in a waste-disposal slot. "We've got informants at Purist headquarters. As soon as the new councilmen were sworn in they rammed the Amendment through. They want to catch us unawares." He grinned starkly. "But they won't."

The door slammed and Carl's hurried footsteps diminished down the public hall.

"I've never seen him move so fast," Betty remarked wonderingly.

Horror rose in Don Walsh as he

listened to the rapid, lumbering footsteps of his brother-in-law. Outside the unit, Carl was climbing quickly into his surface car. The motor gunned, and Carl drove off. "He's afraid," Walsh said. "He's in danger."

"I guess he can take care of himself. He's pretty big."

Walsh shakily lit a cigarette. "Even your brother isn't that big. It doesn't seem possible they really mean this. Putting over an Amendment like this, forcing everybody to conform to their idea of what's right. But it's been in the cards for years . . . this is the last step on a large road."

"I wish they'd get it over with, once and for all," Betty complained. "Was it always this way? I don't remember always hearing about politics when I was a child."

"They didn't call it politics, back in those days. The industrialists hammered away at the people to buy and consume. It centered around this hair-sweat-teeth purity; the city people got it and developed an ideology around it."

BETTY set the table and brought in the dishes of food. "You mean the Purist political movement was deliberately started?"

"They didn't realize what a hold it was getting on them. They didn't know their children were growing

up to take such things as underarm perspiration and white teeth and nice-looking hair as the most important things in the world. Things worth fighting and dying for. Things important enough to kill those who didn't agree."

"The Naturalists were country people?"

"People who lived outside the cities and weren't conditioned by the stimuli." Walsh shook his head irritably. "Incredible, that one man will kill another over trivialities. All through history men murdering each other over verbal nonsense, meaningless slogans instilled in them by somebody else — who sits back and benefits."

"It isn't meaningless if they believe in it."

"It's meaningless to kill another man because he has halitosis! It's meaningless to beat up somebody because he hasn't had his sweat glands removed and artificial waste-excretion tubes installed. There's going to be senseless warfare; the Naturalists have weapons stored up at Party headquarters. Men'll be just as dead as if they died for something real."

"Time to eat, dear," Betty said, indicating the table.

"I'm not hungry."

"Stop sulking and eat. Or you'll have indigestion, and you know what that means."

He knew what it meant, all right.

It meant his life was in danger. One belch in the presence of a Purist and it was a life and death struggle. There was no room in the same world for men who belched and men who wouldn't tolerate men who belched. Something had to give . . . and it had already given. The Amendment had been passed: the Naturalists' days were numbered.

"Jimmy will be late tonight," Betty said, as she helped herself to lamb chops, green peas, and creamed corn. "There's some sort of Purist celebration. Speeches, parades, torch-light rallies." She added wistfully, "I guess we can't go down and watch, can we? It'll be pretty, all the lights and voices, and marching."

"Go ahead." Listlessly, Walsh spooned up his food. He ate without tasting. "Enjoy yourself."

They were still eating, when the door burst open and Carl entered briskly. "Anything left for me?" he demanded.

Betty half-rose, astonished. "Carl! You don't — smell any more."

Carl seated himself and grabbed for the plate of lamb chops. Then he recollected, and daintily selected a small one, and a tiny portion of peas. "I'm hungry," he admitted, "but not too hungry." He ate carefully, quietly.

Walsh gazed at him dumb-

founded. "What the hell's happened?" he demanded. "Your hair — and your teeth and breath. *What did you do?*"

Without looking up, Carl answered, "Party tactics. We're beating a strategical retreat. In the face of this Amendment, there's no point in doing something foolhardy. Hell, we don't intend to get slaughtered." He sipped some luke-warm coffee. "As a matter of fact, we've gone underground."

**W**ALSH slowly lowered his fork. "You mean you're not going to fight?"

"Hell, no. It's suicide." Carl glanced furtively around. "Now listen to me. I'm completely in conformity with the provisions of the Horney Amendment; nobody can pin a thing on me. When the cops come snooping around; keep your mouths shut. The Amendment gives the right to recant, and that's technically what we've done. We're clean; they can't touch us. But let's just not say anything." He displayed a small blue card. "A Purist membership card. Backdated; we planned for any eventuality."

"Oh, Carl!" Betty cried delightedly. "I'm so glad. You look just — wonderful!"

Walsh said nothing.

"What's the matter?" Betty demanded. "Isn't this what you wanted? You didn't want them to

fight and kill each other —” Her voice rose shrilly. “Won’t anything satisfy you? This is what you wanted and you’re still dissatisfied. What on earth more do you want?”

There was noise below the unit. Carl sat up straight, and for an instant color left his face. He would have begun sweating if it were still possible. “That’s the conformity police,” he said thickly. “Just sit tight; they’ll make a routine check and keep on going.”

“Oh, dear,” Betty gasped. “I hope they don’t break anything. Maybe I better go and freshen up.”

“Just sit still,” Carl grated. “There’s no reason for them to suspect anything.”

When the door opened, Jimmy stood dwarfed by the green-tinted conformity police.

“There he is!” Jimmy shrilled, indicating Carl. “He’s a Naturalist official! Smell him!”

The police spread efficiently into the room. Standing around the immobile Carl, they examined him briefly, then moved away. “No body odor,” the police sergeant disagreed. “No halitosis. Hair thick and well-groomed.” He signalled, and Carl obediently opened his mouth. “Teeth white, totally brushed. Nothing nonacceptable. No, this man is all right.”

Jimmy glared furiously at Carl. “Pretty smart.”

Carl picked stoically at his plate

of food and ignored the boy and the police.

“Apparently we’ve broken the core of Naturalist resistance,” the sergeant said into his neck-phone. “At least in this area there’s no organized opposition.”

“Good,” the phone answered. “Your area was a stronghold. We’ll go ahead and set up the compulsory purification machinery, though. It should be implemented as soon as possible.”

One of the cops turned his attention to Don Walsh. His nostrils twitched and then a harsh, oblique expression settled over his face. “What’s your name?” he demanded.

Walsh gave his name.

The police came cautiously around him. “Body odor,” one noted. “But hair fully restored and groomed? Open your mouth.”

Walsh opened his mouth.

“Teeth clean and white. But —” The cop sniffed. “Faint halitosis . . . stomach variety. I don’t get it. Is he a Naturalist or isn’t he?”

“He’s not a Purist,” the sergeant said. “No Purist would have body odor. So he must be a Naturalist.”

Jimmy pushed forward. “This man,” he explained, “is only a fellow hiker. He’s not a party member.”

“You know him?”

“He’s — related to me,” Jimmy

admitted.

The police took notes. "He's been playing around with Naturalists, but he hasn't gone the whole way?"

"He's on the fence," Jimmy agreed. "A quasi-Naturalist. He can be salvaged; this shouldn't be a criminal case."

"Remedial action," the sergeant noted. "All right, Walsh," he addressed Walsh. "Get your things and let's go. The Amendment provides compulsory purification for your type of person; let's not waste time."

Walsh hit the sergeant in the jaw.

The sergeant sprawled foolishly, arms flapping, dazed with disbelief. The cops drew their guns hysterically and milled around the room shouting and knocking into each other. Betty began to scream wildly. Jimmy's shrill voice was lost in the general uproar.

Walsh grabbed up a table lamp and smashed it over a cop's head. The lights in the apartment flickered and died out; the room was a chaos of yelling blackness. Walsh encountered a body; he kicked with his knee and with a groan of pain the body settled down. For a moment he was lost in the seething din; then his fingers found the door. He pried it open and scrambled out into the public corridor.

One shape followed, as Walsh reached the descent lift: "Why?"

Jimmy wailed unhappily. "I had it all fixed — you didn't have to worry!"

His thin, metallic voice faded as the lift plunged down the well to the ground floor. Behind Walsh, the police were coming cautiously out into the hall; the sound of their boots echoed dismally after him.

He examined his watch. Probably, he had fifteen or twenty minutes. They'd get him, then; it was inevitable. Taking a deep breath, he stepped from the lift and as calmly as possible walked down the dark, deserted commercial corridor, between the rows of black store-entrances.

CHARLEY was lit up and animate, when Walsh entered the ante-chamber. Two men were waiting, and a third was being interviewed. But at the sight of the expression on Walsh's face, the robot waved him instantly in.

"What is it, Don?" it asked seriously, indicating a chair. "Sit down and tell me what's on your mind."

Walsh told it.

When he was finished, the analyst sat back and gave a low, soundless whistle. "That's a felony, Don. They'll freeze you for that; it's a provision of the new Amendment."

"I know," Walsh agreed. He felt no emotion. For the first time in years the ceaseless swirl of feelings

and thoughts had been purged from his mind. He was a little tired and that was all.

The robot shook its head. "Well, Don, you're finally off the fence. That's something, at least; you're finally moving." It reached thoughtfully into the top drawer of its desk and got out a pad. "Is the police pick-up van here, yet?"

"I heard sirens as I came in the ante-room. It's on its way."

The robot's metal fingers drummed restlessly on the surface of the big mahogany desk. "Your sudden release of inhibition marks the moment of psychological integration. You're not undecided anymore are you?"

"No," Walsh said.

"Good, Well, it had to come sooner or later. I'm sorry it had to come this way, though."

"I'm not," Walsh said. "This was the only way possible. It's clear to me, now. Being undecided isn't necessarily a negative thing. Not seeing anything in slogans and organized parties and beliefs and dying can be a belief worth dying for, in itself. I thought I was without a creed . . . now I realize I have a very strong creed."

The robot wasn't listening. It scribbled something on its pad, signed it, and then expertly tore it off. "Here." It handed the paper briskly to Walsh.

"What's this?" Walsh demanded.

"I don't want anything to interfere with your therapy. You're finally coming around—and we want to keep moving." The robot got quickly to its feet. "Good luck, Don. Show that to the police; if there's any trouble have them call me."

The slip was a voucher from the Federal Psychiatric Board. Walsh turned it over numbly. "You mean this'll get me off?"

"You were acting compulsively; you weren't responsible. There'll be a cursory examination, of course, but nothing to worry about." The robot slapped him good-naturedly on the back. "It was your final neurotic act . . . now you're free. That was the pent-up stuff; strictly a symbolic assertion of libido—with no political significance."

"I see," Walsh said.

The robot propelled him firmly toward the external exit. "Now go on out there and give the slip to them." From its metal chest the robot popped a small bottle. "And take one of these capsules before you go to sleep. Nothing serious, just a mild sedative to quiet your nerves. Everything will be all right; I'll expect to see you again, soon. And keep this in mind: we're finally making some real progress."

Walsh found himself outside in the night darkness. A police van was pulled up at the entrance of the unit, a vast ominous black shape

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against the dead sky. A crowd of curious people had collected at a safe distance, trying to make out what was going on.

Walsh automatically put the bottle of pills away in his coat pocket. He stood for a time breathing the chill night air, the cold clear smell of darkness and evening. Above his head a few bright pale stars glittered remotely.

"Hey," one of the policemen shouted. He flashed his light suspiciously in Walsh's face. "Come over here."

"That looks like him," another said. "Come on, buddy. Make it snappy."

Walsh brought out the voucher Charley had given him. "I'm coming," he answered. As he walked up to the policeman he carefully tore the paper to shreds and tossed

the shreds to the night wind. The wind picked the shreds up and scattered them away.

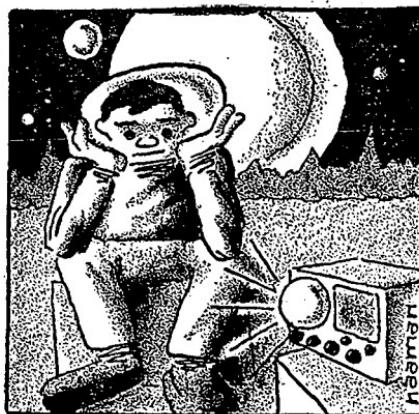
"What the hell did you do?" one of the cops demanded.

"Nothing," Walsh answered. "I just threw away some waste paper. Something I won't be needing."

"What a strange one this one is," a cop muttered, as they froze Walsh with their cold beams. "He gives me the creeps."

"Be glad we don't get more like him," another said. "Except for a few guys like this, everything's going fine."

Walsh's inert body was tossed in the van and the doors slammed shut. Disposal machinery immediately began consuming his body and reducing it to basic mineral elements. A moment later, the van was on its way to the next call.



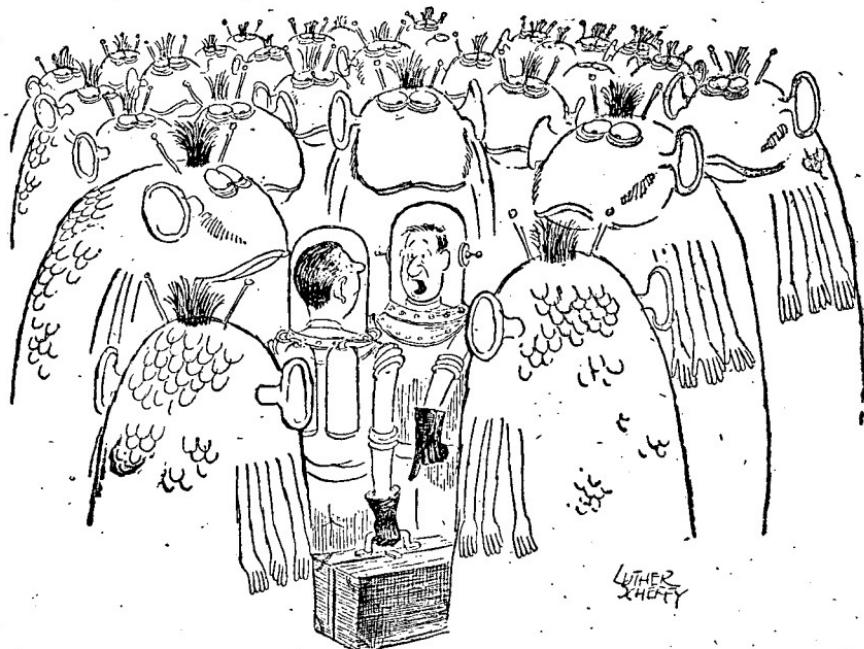
*"...and now, from high atop the La Plaza Hotel  
overlooking Times Square, we bring you . . . "*

# ★ Archeological Geigers! ★

THE field of archeology is now being invaded by the Geiger counter, which can measure the amount of radioactive material present in all once living things. It is possible to set within reason, the date of prehistoric ruins to 25,000 years ago. The method was worked out by a Chicago University scientist who discovered that radioactive carbon is generated in the earth's upper atmosphere at a steady rate. The carbon atoms produce carbon dioxide which is neces-

sary for all plant life. As all plants absorb some radioactive carbon, it follows that the animal life which feed on plants will have absorbed some too, and become slightly radioactive.

After the plant or animal dies, the radioactivity goes on at a constantly diminishing, fixed rate. The Geiger counter measures the amount of radioactivity left and from that can be determined how much time has elapsed since the plant or animal died.



"Well, what are you waiting for? Get out the trinkets!"

# The Lonely

by

*William F. Temple*

**This is a shocking story; you'll know why after you read it. The irony is that in a world near-destroyed such a situation might exist! . . .**

The city wore its silence like a robe. And silence became it: it gave it a dignity it had largely lacked in life. The skeletons were decorous too. They didn't sprawl or lapse into mere heaps of bones. They reclined serenely, as though each body had been laid out religiously and the last rites given. Segmatis, was an easy death and began with a doze.

The rats had done their job cleanly and without haste: there was plenty of food for all and no one to disturb them. There was nothing to fight for or to run from. They fed quietly, reflected awhile, dozed, and died. And were eaten in their turn.

Patricia remembered the city as once it was: when thousands of pedestrians clashed on the sidewalks like opposing armies and in the streets the cars jockeyed for

position like racing chariots. Penning them in these overcrowded ways were walls of plate-glass. Behind the glass, magically withheld by the invisible laws of economics and sociology, were the prizes they were hurrying for: the shiny big cars, the mink coats, the console TV sets . . .

She first saw the city on such a day when she was sixteen.

She was fat and homely even in those days, and aware of her lack of attraction for boys. She was also aware of her lack of money. She frowned through the transparent barrier, resenting its presence. She regarded the minks, the sable stoles, the flimsy primrose evening frocks, the tiaras and necklaces that scorned the label "Genuine" because everyone knew that behind those particular windows they were.



And she vowed: "One day I shall walk into those shops and have anything I like."

She meant that. Fat she might be, but not flabby: her mind was as tough as gristle. It might take time, it would take ruthlessness, but she would get what she wanted in the end.

And now, any and every day,

she could walk into those shops and have anything she liked. The invisible laws were broken. Civilization couldn't stop her: there was no civilization.

Civilization had been over-cautious. It had refused to use the hydrogen bomb because it wanted in some form to survive the war. Instead, it experimented carefully

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with bacteriological warfare. The virus of segmitis was nothing like so careful. It went bustling rudely about the world in and out of the fleshly sanctums, indifferent to stations, nationalities, ideologies, souls, or even anti-bodies.

But a chosen few of the violated were equally indifferent to it. Patricia was one of them. It had made her feel sleepy for awhile, and that was all.

She knew she wasn't alone in the world, nor even in Britian. But there weren't many people left. So far she'd seen only two, both women: one at Southampton, one at Salsbury. They were very old and she didn't worry about them.

She hadn't seen a man but she believed there must be one somewhere. There had to be. In all the stories she had read about the end of the world by decimation, there was always the Adam-and-Eve gimmick. There was often only one sample of each, but never less.

What had happened recently had kept faithfully to the conventional grooves of those stories. Therefore it followed almost axiomatically that somewhere there survived a man for her, a man whom the Lonely Hearts Club had never succeeded in providing for her, a man in no position to discriminate about his mate. But to get him she might have to fall back on smoke signals, it seemed.

Either her instinct or her memories had guided her to make the long trek from the West Country to London. There had been eight million people in London. Surely there were some left?

But she'd now been here for two months without seeing a soul. She had established herself in a flamboyantly luxurious apartment overlooking an area once claimed by the citizens (as Times Square and the Place de la Opera had also been claimed) as the center of the world. Maybe the proximity of Eros had subconsciously influenced her, but the choice also had logic behind it. Anyone exploring London would inevitably visit the Circus, if only for the sake of sentiment.

After a time she became tired of looking out of the window and finding, day after day, that the only other inhabitant of the Circus was the God of Love. He was a nice-looking boy but one could scarcely expect much response from a well-shaped chunk of aluminum. However, she'd make him carry a torch for her, in a sense. With some difficulty she managed to hang a poster from his free arm. It said:

I AM LIVING IN LONDON,  
NOT FAR FROM HERE.  
PLEASE CONTACT ME BY  
FIRING THE GUN IN THE  
CASE BELOW.

## P. STANLEY.

THE gun which she left in its case on the steps had come from a famous sports store in Piccadilly. The cartridges she'd put in with it were blanks. She had a considerably better gun in her apartment, together with cartridges that were not blanks.

She had hesitated over the "P. Stanley" but finally decided to be non-committal. One secret of being the master of any situation was not to lay all one's cards on the table, and she intended always to be the master—even if the man turned out to be the film star of her dreams.

Again, the first reader of the notice might be another woman. Patricia didn't object too strongly to a man hunting her, knowing that she was a woman. But she didn't want a woman on her trail knowing that she was a woman. She allowed that there might be saints, but she never visualized any of them as female. Men might be brutal or they might be kind. But women . . . she was a woman and therefore he knew what they were like: predatory, intolerant jealous, ruthless.

Mainly because of that, she carried a small but lethal automatic in her handbag.

The days passed slowly in the silent city. Patricia inspected the

poster and the gun daily and neither appeared to have been touched.

Spring came, a time of sun and showers and something in the blood. Patricia became restless.

Was she really alone in the city? Should she not forage further afield?

One warm bright day she stood on the top floor of London University staring at the fresh green woods on the distant hills of Hampstead. Daffodils were growing wild up there and no doubt a fresh cool breeze was stirring the leafy branches. Down here in the city nothing stirred except her blood. And that seemed to be racing. She was alive, more alive than she ever remembered being before.

She looked at the far woods again. She recalled Sunday evening walks up there, herself always alone, while all about her young lovers sauntered hand in hand between the trees.

Her hands began to clench, unclench, and clench again.

She gave a great sigh of bitter longing.

"Oh, God, get me a man!"

The woods called, but she was afraid to answer that call. The Circus surely remained the best bet. Perhaps the very day she turned her back on it a man would come—and go. Even at this moment he might be approaching, coming from the south over Westminster

Bridge . . .

She turned from the window and went down the stairs.

Back in the Circus, Eros remained poised untiringly upon the ball of one foot. His stringless bow and invisible arrows of love were a mockery. So was the poster he bore; she felt like yanking the stupid thing down.

To calm herself she dressed in her best summer frock, gaily flowered, made up her face and took out with her a pale lemon parasol to keep the early afternoon sun from dazzling her eyes. She carried her handbag slung from her shoulder.

She walked below the turrets and cupolas of Whitehall to the Victoria Embankment, and along beside the river! The air was fresher here, and the sight of the quietly flowing water soothed her. She recalled, from school, the Tennysonian jingle:

*"Men may come, and men may go, But I go on for ever."*

It ran through her head, over and over, and became wishfully abbreviated: "Men may come, men may come, men may come . . ."

Presently, she found herself on Westminster Bridge, waiting. Someone was coming. She sensed it. The man from the south? She leaned on the parapet looking steadily along the bridge between the blocks of the County Hall and the big hospital. And as she waited the ser-

enity of the afternoon settled on her. The sun was benignly warm, the brown river ran gently. On such a spring day as this there must be other life about besides her own. Strong male life too: the very existence of her need seemed to warrant, as a corollary, the means of its satisfaction.

"Waitin' for someone?" asked a voice behind her.

The shock of hearing another voice, suddenly, was great. With it came a wave of disappointment. It was a female voice and coarse at that.

Patricia composed herself and turned.

THE girl surveying her was perhaps twenty. She had a fine tan and was showing plenty of it. She was wearing merely one piece of a two-piece swim-suit, and sandals. It seemed that she was accustomed to going around that way for her breasts were as brown as her legs. Her eyes were pale blue and showed well against the bronze. Her hair was Cletic black and arranged carefully. She wore no make-up, but her lips were very red.

The two looked each other over from top to toe and back, in the calculating way peculiar to women. Patricia sought a flaw in the other, and apart from the unmusical voice, could not find one.

What the young girl found be-

came evident. She smiled sneeringly, crushingly—and in the act gave back to Patricia her self-possession. For the smile was marred by a set of tainted teeth.

Patricia said nothing, which slightly disconcerted the other.

"Dressed to kill, ain't you?" ventured the girl, presently.

"Ain't much use, is it, when anybody can help themselves to the best clothes goin'? Lord, I've thrown away better rags than you've got on."

"It so happens that I didn't dress to impress you," said Patricia, levelly.

"Who did you want to impress, then—men? You got some funny ideas about men, lovey. They're not interested in how women dress: only how they undress. But maybe you knew that all the time. Maybe that's really why you're all dressed up."

"And presumably why you're undressed."

"Of course. A girl's got to make the most of herself."

"Then you'd better go see a dentist."

The girl flushed.

"Now, see here, Fatty—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Patricia. "What the hell difference does it make whether we dress or undress or jump in the river? There aren't any men left."

The girl looked at her narrowly.

"Who says not?" she replied, quietly.

Patricia caught her breath. "You—you mean you've seen one?"

"More than *seen* one," hinted the girl, her unpleasant smile returning.

"Where?"

"Wouldn't you like to know!"

Patricia closed her parasol deliberately and leaned it against the parapet. She clicked open her handbag, dug in it, and suddenly the little pistol flashed in the sun. She held it a foot from the girl's bosom, which began to display signs of agitation.

"Where did you meet this man?" Patricia insisted.

"Put that thing away, madam—miss—please. You wouldn't —"

"I would. Don't run, or I'll shoot you in the back. Answer me."

"Up on Hampstead Heath. He's not very bright, really. Nice-looking chap, mind you, and young too, but kinda dopey. Always spoutin' poetry. Not my kind. Put that gun away, lady, go on."

"What are you doing in my area?"

"Your area? You don't own all London, y'know. I gotta right to hunt here, same as you. What d'you call your area?"

"Anywhere within five miles of Piccadilly Circus."

"Picc—Did you hang up that notice at the Circus?"

"You read it?"

"No. I can't read. But I thought it looked funny. You live near the Circus?"

"Never mind," said Patricia, and then, as the girl began to giggle, "What's funny?"

The girl stopped giggling. "Nothing."

Patricia searched her face. "You're hiding something. What's amusing you? Tell me, or by heaven—"

The girl blurted: "It's only that a man lives right near the Circus. I seen him. A big tall man. Looks a proper gent."

"What? What?" stammered Patricia.

"I seen him twice. Both times I called out to him, and he ran away. The first time I lost him down an alley. The second time I chased him across the Green Park. He runs like a bloomin' champion. Left me standin'. Ain't you ever seen him?"

Patricia didn't answer. She was thinking.

The girl looked around her uneasily, as if seeking an excuse to go. The tall tower of the Houses of Parliament stood silently over streets as empty as the eyeholes of the skeletons, and the hands of Big Ben were clasped together to register that it was five after one. Big Ben had been claiming that it was five after one for almost a year now.

"Look," said the girl, suddenly. "You can have my feller up at Hampstead. He won't run away. He'll be glad to see you. You leave me this pigeon in Piccadilly. I'll catch up with him one day."

"I'm afraid you won't," said Patricia. "I'm sorry, but I can't risk having any rivals around."

**S**HE raised the gun a trifle and pulled the trigger. The girl whose name she did not know fell backwards under the impact of the bullet, her arms flung wide. Her young body lay draped over the grey old parapet like a virgin laid on a sacrificial altar stone. Her breast pointed to the bright blue sky of spring and her long jet hair hung down towards the scummy water. Patricia replaced her gun, seized both the slim ankles and heaved. There was a dirty white splash near the foot of one of the piers, and then the brown river had absorbed the brown body.

Patricia picked up her parasol, hesitated, then tossed it over the parapet too. She was impatient to get to the Circus and set off in quick strides.

When she got there she noticed at once that the gun-case on the steps had been moved a couple of yards from where she'd left it. But probably the girl had done that. Nevertheless, Patricia opened it. There was a note on fine vellum

paper stuffed into the trigger-guard of the gun. It was terse to the point of courtesy.

*"I'm not far from here, too. Tell me more about yourself."*

*J. Harrison."*

It was he! Or was it? J for John—or Jean, or James, or Josephine . . . ? She was annoyed with the writer for playing her own game.

She examined the gun. It hadn't been fired. That annoyed her too.

After a moment of reflection she scribbled across the note "PTO," and on the back she wrote: "*Let's meet here. Fire the gun and wait.—Pat.*"

Then she went up to her apartment and settled herself comfortably at the window with a pair of field-glasses at one elbow and a box of candy at the other.

The afternoon was very long. No one came. The sun sank and slowly the shadows filled the unlit Circus, submerging Eros. Then it was night. Patricia dozed off, still by the window.

Late in the night she was dreaming. It was a pleasant dream. She was walking along Oxford Street and all the shop windows were ablaze with strip lighting, and from behind her, from all the shop doorways, came soft wolf whistles. One of her admirers began to follow her, a long way behind, whistling melodiously. It was a sad little tune. Gradually she awakened to it.

She was in her room and the plaintive whistling was dying away somewhere down there in the quiet streets.

She fought herself properly awake and peered hard through the window. There was nothing to see but darkness. She found a torch and stumbled down the stairs and out into the cool air of the Circus.

Six streets converged on the Circus. Which of them had the whistler taken? She looked a little way down each of them in turn, waving her torch, but saw no other light nor heard any further sound.

Then she looked in the gun-case. There was a fresh sheet of vellum notepaper there. Written on it was: "*Dear Pat, I'll meet you here tomorrow at sunset. No, I refuse to fire the gun—I abominate noise. Jeffrey.*"

It was a man! Her heart started to pound. She returned to her apartment in a happy daze, made herself some tea on the oil stove, lit a cigarette and settled down to wait for the dawn. She was too excited to sleep further, and the fire within her could not be damped down until sunset.

She chain-smoked through the rest of the night, trying to visualize what sort of man Jeffrey was. The girl had said he was big and tall and a gentleman. Presumably he was moderately young and physically fit, for he'd outrun the girl.

But why had he run from her? Patricia told herself that it was because he was sensitive to vulgarity—his last note indicated that—and although the girl had been pretty, her utter lack of good taste and modesty was obvious at a glance.

Occasionally Patricia found herself humming that sad little tune of his, which she'd now identified: Tchaikovsky's *Chanson Triste*. Jeffrey, it seemed, was a music-lover.

**I**N the pale dawn she dressed very carefully in quiet colors, modestly, tastefully, and was at pains to get her stocking seams straight.

Then she set off hunting, quartering the immediate neighborhood. She could write off most buildings after a brief examination of their halls, where the dust-coated floors showed no signs of footprints. But some were doubtful and she wasted much time plodding around in them, opening doors and climbing stairs.

By noon she was hot, dusty, rather tired and irritable. She came out into Piccadilly, wondering which way to turn.

Then she heard it — distant music. An orchestra, or rather, a recording of one. Her tiredness and irritation vanished. Her heart melted at the music. It was Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* Overture, and it was building up towards the introduction of the love theme.

There could have been no more appropriate music for her. Jeffrey must be feeling as she felt.

She traced the, strains to the Albany, that ancient and exclusive private way, a nest of luxurious and strictly bachelor apartments. She pushed at the gate and it opened. She wandered along the narrow way. The music was much louder and the Montagues and Capulets were clashing with a great ringing of swords.

She found the right stairway, and paused at the bottom of it to mop and then powder her face. She was trembling, and her finicking amounted to small improvement. As she smoothed her dress down, the music stopped suddenly in the middle of the battle. Presumably the noise had become a little overpowering for Jeffrey.

She braced herself, and went upstairs. There were three-doors. She heard a slight movement behind one, and pushed it gently open.

A tall, broad man in a silk dressing-gown was in the act of putting another record on the old-fashioned acoustic phonograph. He looked up, raising his eyebrows. She saw at once that he was strikingly handsome. His eyes were big and dark, his nose thin and aristocratic, his lips rather full but quite firm. His black hair was brushed immaculately. His short sideburns were cleanly shaven and just beginning

to grey. She put his age at thirty-five.

And then his brows came down in a frown.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" His voice was cultivated, almost exquisitely so.

"I'm—I'm Pat."

The frown changed to utter disappointment and frustration. His eyes held pain. He sighed.

"Pat? I thought you were a—"

"Yes?"

"Never mind. I'm sorry, Pat, I shan't be along at sunset after all."

Patricia gave a little hurt cry. "Am I really so repulsive? I'm not very old really, and I'm sure I could slim—"

"It isn't that. I just want to be left alone. You're probably quite a sweet woman-girl. But I'm a natural recluse. I prefer to live in solitude here. My books and records and paintings and memories are sufficient solace."

"Solace for what? Was there another woman?"

"No, Pat. You wouldn't understand."

"Oh," Patricia turned away. Her eyes were moist with her own disappointment. "You are Jeffrey?" she muttered, clutching at the flimsiest of straws.

"I'm afraid so."

Patricia walked around the room, picking up this and that aimlessly, trying to pull herself together. She

looked dully along the bookshelves, seeing familiar titles: *Leaves of Grass*, *Moby Dick*, *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, *Apostate*, *Bevis*, *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* . . .

She looked at the fine glassware, the etchings, the oil-paintings which seemed to be mostly of young men, the sculptures and the thick rugs, and realized that elegance of a kind alien to her unified the room.

Jeffrey watched her with growing impatience.

"Tut-tut." He reached out and adjusted the position of the statuette copy of Michelangelo's "David," which she had replaced all of an inch from where it had stood.

Often before she had been made to feel that she wasn't wanted, but never so forcibly and unmistakably as now.

"I'll be going, then," she said, listlessly.

"Goodbye and good luck," he said, quickly and relievedly.

**S**HE closed the door behind her. Halfway down the stairs she broke down into tears. As she sobbed, the phonograph started again. This time it was a heart-breaking wail of despair and loneliness, again fitting her mood. It was the last movement of Tchaikovsky's last symphony. Jeffrey seemed to have a strong penchant for the melancholy Russian. Even in her grief, part of her mind wondered

why.

And then a suspicion sprang to life and spread like a fast-growing evil weed. She might be quite wrong, she told herself. But the weed gathered strength from small selected evidences and grew all over her mind, darkening it, strangling reservations for the side of innocence, killing merciful judgment.

She dried her eyes, set her lips in a prim line, and marched back up the stairs. She flung open the door. Jeffrey was sitting dejectedly in the chair by the phonograph. He raised a startled, tear-stained face. The tears did not touch her heart: they were not for her, and so they only strengthened her purpose.

She shot him twice as he sat there, and then made quite sure that he was dead.

The heart-cry of the *Pathetique*

suddenly changed into a silly scratching noise. She lifted the tone-arm from the record and slammed the lid shut. Then she slammed the door behind her just as noisily. But all the noise in the world could not disturb him now.

Back in her own apartment she packed essentials for her move to Hampstead.

In the early afternoon she set out, carrying them.

As she reached Eros, she paused and looked up at him. He seemed almost like an old friend now, so she told him confidentially: "I had to do it, you know. I never had much on the ball at any time and I'm past my best now. A girl's got to watch out for herself. Especially me. I just can't afford to risk having *any* rivals around."

Then she went on past him, beginning the long walk north.

THE END



## Maelstrom Of Gas



**F**EW people would argue against the thesis that the gas engine—in cars, planes, farm machinery, and a million other applications—has made the modern world. In spite of this tribute, from an engineer's standpoint, the reciprocating gas engine is a clumsy inefficient machine. Is there anything better?

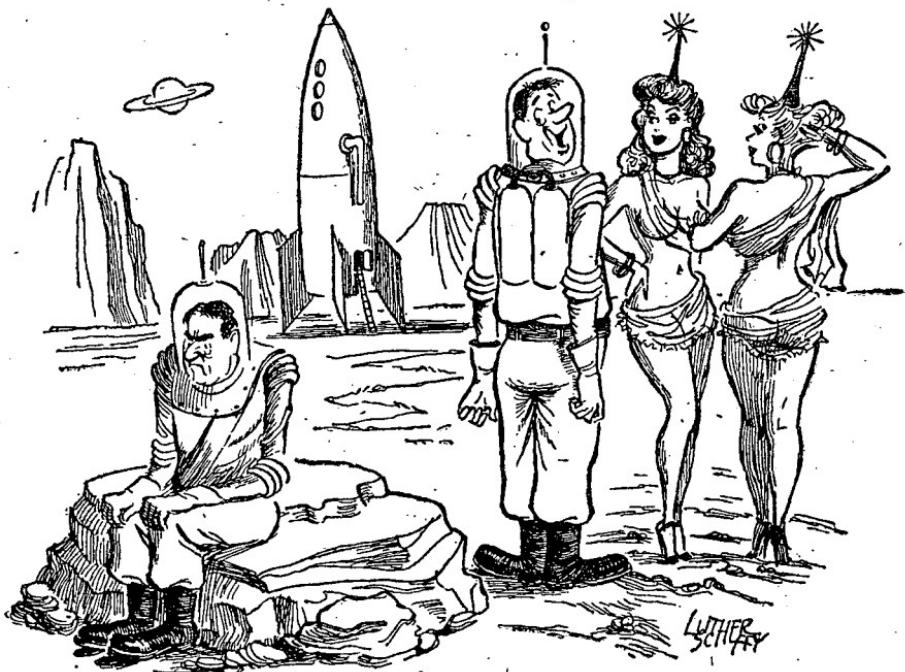
The answer is yes—the gas turbine! This is the machine which in the next few decades is going to supplant the piston engine we know so well, in the very same applications. Already small, packaged gas turbines are appearing (the big ones in certain power plants have proved wonderful) in car and truck and plane engines. The reason for

the superiority of the gas turbine is the fact that it has only a few moving parts contrasted with the hundreds in ordinary engines. This simplicity makes for efficiency and compactness. A hundred horsepower gas turbine may weigh little more than fifty to a hundred pounds compared to the equivalent ordinary engine's two or three hundred pounds! And of course where there are so few moving parts, wear is trivial and maintenance hardly necessary.

The only drawback to present gas turbines in most applications (except planes) is their gulping

fuel consumption. They use too much, but technology is rapidly squeezing down this voraciousness and the gas turbine is becoming competitive. If you want to bet on a sure thing, the gas turbine is it.

A particularly bright future is assured the gas turbine as a power plant for tomorrow's workhorse—the helicopter. This combination will be unbeatable. Gas turbines with few gears, no vibration and tremendous power, will tomorrow make the helicopter what the truck and car are today. The turbine wheel spins like the Loom of Time—making the tapestry of tomorrow . . .



"Refreshments!"



## *Conducted by Mari Wolf*

THE Labor Day weekend has become one of the major anniversaries for any science fiction fan. The occasion: the annual world Science Fiction Convention, held each year in a different part of the country. This year, 1955, it's the 13th World Science Fiction Convention, and it will be in Cleveland, Ohio.

Judging by advance reports, this year's affair should be one of the very best yet. If you're near enough to attend, you really should try to make it. If you've attended a science fiction convention before you won't need a sales talk; if you haven't, maybe you should just talk to someone who has.

There is quite a tradition built up in these Conventions. In the last few years they have grown big, with many hundreds of people attending. Not all of the attendees in these last conventions have been

active fans; there have been a fair percentage of local residents who perhaps read science fiction and were interested enough in the idea of a science fiction convention to drop by. From these casual droppers-in there are always a few active fans recruited, but I imagine that to a lot of them the whole idea of fandom is a bit bewildering.

There are certain features about the Conventions that have become definitely traditionalized. There is a banquet, with a guest of honor. There are the speeches by leading professional writers, editors, and fans. There are the discussion panels covering many aspects of the general field. There is the auction, where you can buy original artwork including cover paintings that the professional magazines have donated. There is a masquerade ball, or similar party, winding up the affair.

And there are, of course, all the informal parties that fans string out all night long during Convention times.

These traditions have grown up gradually, as the Conventions themselves have grown larger and more widely publicized. The first one, in Philadelphia in 1936 (though according to Sam Moskowitz this was the first regional convention, the first national one being New York's in 1939) was an informal gathering of New York and Philadelphia fans. The 1939 NYcon attracted fans from all parts of the country, but I don't imagine that anyone attending it had any idea how the principle of Conventions would take root, and how many people would eventually attend.

For some years the Convention has traveled from one part of the country to another, so that everyone would have a chance to attend at least occasionally. Last year, at San Francisco, this rotational plan was made official, the country (or rather, North America) being roughly divided into three longitudinal zones, which would host the Convention alternately. This year, with the site being quite centrally located in an area heavily populated by fans, the Labor-Day get-together could easily set a new attendance record.

The Convention Committee, in Cleveland, has been preparing for months. I have at hand the first issue of the committee's Progress Report, and judging from the steps they have already taken as well as those they're planning on taking, they've not only been hard at work preparing a fine program but they have also faced up squarely to

the difficulties that always plague a gathering of this size and type. A lot of the complaints that fans have made against previous Conventions should be done away with this time.

The Committee officers have put a lot of work into making this one the best yet. They have lined up a fine program, headed off by guest of honor Isaac Asimov, who, quite aside from his position as a writer, is a truly fabulous after dinner speaker.

On the regular Convention program there will be several spots given over to fans for the discussion of fannish activities—answering a complaint of some previous Convention attendees, who thought the program too heavily professional. There will be a panel of well known fan collectors to discuss the collecting, cataloguing, and preserving of their s-f and fantasy items. There will be an amateur press symposium to discuss the history of fanzines and the various methods of fanzine reproduction. Also being considered: a formal debate. That, run as planned under the rules, I should really like to hear.

Perhaps one of the best features of all, though, is the Convention Committee's hotel arrangement. In the past, as the conventions have grown there has been more and more trouble over hotel accommodations. There have been complaints pricewise, and even more importantly, complaints that the Convention rooms were locked up at night, leaving fans with nowhere to go if they wanted to have a bull session. Since there are always a lot of fans staying somewhere else than at the official hotel (especially if

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that hotel is relatively high priced) and since the hotel managements have, in the past, frowned on non-guests being on the premises late at night, there have been fans who found themselves left out completely once the regular sessions were over. This year the Hotel Manger, in addition to quoting very reasonable rates, has agreed to leave one of the Convention rooms open all night for bull sessions.

THE choice of hotel seems like a fan's dream come true. The Hotel Manger will guarantee the Convention 325 rooms out of a possible total of 355. Rates as quoted in the report are Single with Bath \$5.00 to \$9.00; Double with Bath \$7.00 to \$9.00; Twin Beds with Bath, \$9.00 to \$12.00. If you want a suite it will be \$21 or \$22. Reservations must be made through the hotel. Not through the Convention Committee.

Meal prices at the hotel are also comparably low. The banquet will feature a complete meal served at the table (no chow line). Also, after fans attending the banquet have finished eating, the doors will be thrown open so that those who did not attend will be able to come in and listen to the after dinner speeches.

For those fans (and professionals) who want to have displays at the Convention, another feature will be the free table space available this year. This has been made available to fan clubs and to individual fans with collections to sell as well as to the professional book and magazine publishers. Arrangements have been made for the display room to be locked at night.

A lot of other features are under discussion. At the time I write this there is a poll in progress to determine whether fans would like to be able to purchase souvenirs of the Convention at a nominal price. Suggestions for such souvenirs: playing cards with s-f illo on the back, tie clasp or cuff links, pin or earrings, with an s-f theme.

In addition to the scheduled speakers, the Convention this time will have a Mystery Guest. The Committee has been running a contest on the identity of this mystery guest (yes, he's been selected, long ago). As the Progress Report explains it: "The Mystery Guest is a person that every member of the Convention probably knows. He is extremely prominent for the work and service that he performs for fandom in general, but he is not necessarily a fan in the strict sense of the word. Whether he is a fan or pro is immaterial to whether he deserves this special honor. Mostly, he is a person who is there when the committee needs a friend. He is one of those that is used every year and never receives any acclaim. Cleveland feels that it is about time that this person be honored."

The contest: identify the person referred to above. If you guess right, you'll be eligible for a special drawing of one of the choice items of artwork that the committee receives.

To enter, you must be a registered member of the 13th World Science Fiction Convention. You must send your choice, postmarked not later than August 1st, to Mystery Guest Contest, at the Conven-

tion address given at the end of this editorial. Submit your choice (one choice only) on a plain sheet of paper along with your registration card number and your signature in ink.

Whether or not you enter the contest, you should still get your convention membership in advance. If you plan to go anyway, buy your membership now instead of when you arrive; it will help the Committee a lot to have the money on hand for pre-Convention expenditures. Even if you're too far away to attend, you can still support the Convention. Membership this year is \$2.00. This is double the fee charged by previous Conventions, but I'm sure that no fan who really thinks the situation through will object to the increased levy. The \$1.00 fee has been much too low for years, making the Committee too dependent on raising money by subsidiary means, such as the Banquet and the auction. This way, you'll pay what's still a very low price, and get a better deal for your money.

For your \$2.00, you can attend all the regular program features except such special events as the Banquet. Your membership also entitles you to all the Progress Reports put out by the Committee before the Convention itself. Your money, and all communications with the Convention, should be sent to:

13th World Science Fiction Convention, P. O. Box 508, Edgewater Branch, Cleveland 7, Ohio.

I certainly hope you'll be able to attend.

\* \* \*

Now to the fanzines. This time there's a considerably higher percentage than usual of good ones;

I've enjoyed reading them and I'm sure you will enjoy them too.

\* \* \*

INSIDE and SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER: 25c; bimonthly; Ronald L. Smith, 111 S. Howard, Tampa 6, Florida. You get to expecting that, when two very good zines combine, each is likely to give up a lot more than it gains through the combination. I have to admit that I was most unhappy when I heard about the merger of SFA with *Inside*. Now I'm most happy to admit I was wrong; the combined zine is, if anything, even better than either of its origins.

In this issue there are three developments—two in fiction and one in art—of the same theme: "The Martian who hated people." The results couldn't have been more dissimilar. Naaman Peterson's bar scene, of the Martian surrounded by Earthmen, is very good for its type; it looks as if it should be on a magazine cover. But the written versions express the subject a bit more strongly. Joseph Slotkin's version emerges, both in writing and in concept, as something of a reverse-Bradbury idea—far and away above the level of most amateur fiction. But I think that Emil Ludwig's tour de force wins the prize. He writes, not one story, but three, the first a la Bradbury, the second a la Lovecraft, and the third a la Conan Doyle. Slightly exaggerated styles, but not at all out of true . . .

*Inside* has exceptionally good format, cover art and printing, as well as exceptionally good material. It's a 25 center I can recommend without reservation its being well worth the money.

Rating: 1

\* \* \*

EISFA: 5c; monthly; Mr. and Mrs. Robert Coulson; 626 Court St., Huntington, Indiana. The issue I have here is *Eisfa's* second anniversary issue; it's an exception in that it costs 10c. The one that should be current when you read this, though, will have reverted to the usual nickel. As usual, Robert and Juanita Coulson give you a good buy for your money.

Fiction here is considerably better than the average fan fiction. Hal Annas' "Scrambledux" leans a bit too far toward the farcical, with all its humor being strictly situational. Joe Hensley's "The Burning Tyger," despite the obviousness of the title, turns out a well-written tale in its own right.

There's still another take-off on "The Demolished Man," this time by James R. Adams. And Juanita Coulson looks back over two years with *Eisfa*.

Rating: 3

\* \* \*

HYPHEN: 25c or 1/6; Walt Willis, 170, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, N. Ireland. Chuck Harris is also listed as an editor this time; and this time *Hyphen* emerges as its biggest self ever. If it were any other fanzine I'd add "the best ever," but *Hyphen's* normal quality is high enough to make superlatives a bit suspect.

In this fanzine, acknowledged the leader in fannish humor, there's an article by one of fandom's leading humorists, Robert Bloch. Naturally, it's a non-humorous article. Entitled, "Cause to Read Joyce," it's about James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Joyce's impact on other novelists,

and the ups and downs in critical popularity of writers in general and Joyce in particular. Excellent.

There's just too much in this issue to list it all. Brian Varley's "Soames" is a neat bit of satire-fiction, with the perfect ending. Damon Knight's "Logogenetics" gives a name to the old parlor game of combining random words into sentences. (You can get the same effect by rapid dial switching on the radio too.)

Bob Shaw covers a fireworks launching; John Berry tells of his meeting with Bob Shaw's typewriter. And tucked away in the back is a reprint of Marion Eadie's story in a 1941 *Zenith*, "The Prospect Before Us." Sort of Orwell-ish—but before Orwell.

Plus much, much more.

Rating: 1

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ALPHA: 60c a year; American representative, Dick Ellington, 171 St. Marks Ave., Brooklyn 38, N. Y. This is the one and only Belgian fanzine, originating near Antwerp in the minds and on the mimeo of Dave Vendelmans and Jan Jansen. (If you're in Europe you can subscribe for one year for 4 UK shillings, 2.5 Dutch fls., 225 French frs. or 30 Belgian frs. Send subscriptions to Jan Jansen, 229 Berchemlei, Borgerhout (Antwerp) Belgium.)

This issue appears in the guise of a "science fiction fan college," complete with articles on everything from oratory to amateur journalism to folklore and witchcraft. It's the same *Alpha* though—the zine with the distinctive humor and the very clear mimeography.

D. Allen writes about Guy

Fawkes Night, and the mythical burning in effigy of British fan Chuck Harris—funnier, I suppose, if you're in the know on the personalities involved; interesting otherwise in its description of a really wild-fan gathering . . .

Mal Ashworth, in "All Night Party," describes the fans of the future, gathered for a convention in a cave, reminiscing over the good old days when conventions were held in hotels.

Other discussions, ranging from jazz to Dale Smith's formula for putting out a successful fanzine. Apparently this one is getting the recognition it's earning.

Rating: 3

\* \* \*

**VARIOSO:** 10c; John Magnus, 203 Noah, Oberlin, Ohio. Of all the really good fanzines now being published this one, I think, varies most from issue to issue. It's uniformly entertaining, but it just doesn't stay its old familiar self. Must be a lack of editorial slanting; Magnus apparently will publish anything with any connection with fandom, as long as it's interesting and well written. The result is most favorable.

In this issue there's an article originally written for *Vega*: Vernon L. McCain's "Little Seventh Fandom, What Now?" It's a lighter history of fandom from a new perspective, and with new digs at some of the personalities involved.

There is a small portion of text and a profusion of sketches on the Detroit con. ". . . About 60 people attended, including no pros. Therefore the convention was a tremendous success . . ." What would you have done to a gate-crashing pro?

Throw him out of the hotel? Sounded like fun, though, even without evictions . . .

And Dick Clarkson continues his development of "The Subtle Art of Letterhacking," this installment being, "Natural Enemies of the Letterhack." No apparent connection between text and title, unless the editor is the enemy . . . Developed according to Gamesmanship rules, of course.

Rating: 3

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**PHOBOS:** 5c; biweekly; Lee Anne Tremper, 1022 N. Tuxedo St., Indianapolis 1, Ind. This is one of the many zines now coming out of the Indiana SF League, which seems to contain some of the most prolific fans in the country. This one carries book reviews, reviews of foreign science fiction, and at least one story or special article per issue. Despite its frequent publishing schedule, it manages to find material—mostly contributed by the same few really active members of the Indiana contingent.

In the issue I have here Dave Jenrette writes an exposé on "The Truth about John Carter," giving a third-person viewpoint of what really went on in Carter's Mars adventures. JT Crackel covers the pocket editions and Robert Coulson the foreign publications.

Rating: 3

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**EPITOME:** 5c; Mike May, 9428 Hobart St., Dallas 18, Texas. Here's a rather new fanzine (I'm looking at No. 3) that is really quite good in a distinctly fannish way. It doesn't run to fiction, its own quixotic style of humor, serious articles, reviews, or any of the

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other specialties. It just runs to fan personalities, including numerous letters and reports on reports on convention reports.

Mimeoing is very good, even though this one belongs to the unjustified margin school.

Articles, as opposed to the extensive letter section, come written by Dean Grennell, Bob Stewart, and Sam Johnson. As for the Con reports — well, it's interesting to hear the other sides of certain stories, even if you don't agree.

Rating: 5

\* \* \*

**FANTASY-TIMES:** 10c; semi-monthly; Fandom House, P. O. Box 2331, Paterson 23, N. J. James V. Taurasi and Ray Van Houten edit and publish this newspaper of science fiction, in which you'll find just about all the news of what's going on in the sfictional world. If you're across the country from New York, as I am, you'll find that F-T is one of the easiest ways to keep up with the bewildering whirl of changes in the New York publishing field.

Not only does F-T report on the status of current and coming magazines, their editors, policy, etc, it also covers the book, TV, radio, and movie fields of science fiction. Also it covers the foreign news, Convention reports from all over the world, and a certain (though lesser) amount of coverage of purely fan affairs.

It's really the complete newspaper of the professional and convention science fiction worlds, as well as of the major fan movements.

Rating: 3

\* \* \*

**ANDROMEDA:** 5c or 4d; Pete

Campbell, 60 Calgarth Rd., Vindermere, England. This issue of *Andromeda* is little more than a letter zine—maybe a British version of Gafia, caused by too many pages and a too frequent schedule, has struck home.

Other than letters, reviews, and Brian Varley's Convention and club report, about the only thing in this issue is Terry Jeeves' story, "The First Spaceship." The punchline ending weakens it; up to then it purposely incorporates almost every non-scientific idea about rockets, inventions in general, and stf in particular. (Or maybe the punchline ending is part of the whole concept—the type of ending is as much a part of a lot of the stories as the mad scientist.)

Rating: 5

\* \* \*

**NITE CRY:** 10c; bimonthly; Don Chappell, 5921 East 4th Place, Tulsa, Oklahoma. *Nite Cry* is the official publication of the Oklahoma Science Fiction Confederation, and as such it contains a good deal of regional fan news in addition to its more general fiction and articles. The copy I have here is largely taken up with comments about the San Francisco Convention's censure of the Oklacon, held over the same Labor Day weekend. In general, the comments are stated in a non-heated manner, no matter what side of the fence the individual commentator happens to be on.

To me, the whole question seems to have a lot of loaded semantic content. I remember a fan gathering at the Portland Convention in which it was proposed, and agreed to by most fans present, that *no* American fan meeting other than

the World Convention should entitle itself a "Convention." Other such meetings could be "Conferences," "Confabs," or such.

The Oklahoma group broke tradition (1) in having a Convention over Labor Day; (2) in calling it a "Convénient" (if they had held a meeting called by some other name for fans who were unable to make it to the Coast, I'm sure no one would have objected); and (3) of asking professional magazines for auction contributions *at the same time that the World Convention did so*. This, if true, (I have only one side of this story) is the

main point of contention among those present at San Francisco.

Mostly though, a semantic problem . . . It's strange, how even in science fiction circles a word can get so loaded.

Rating: 6

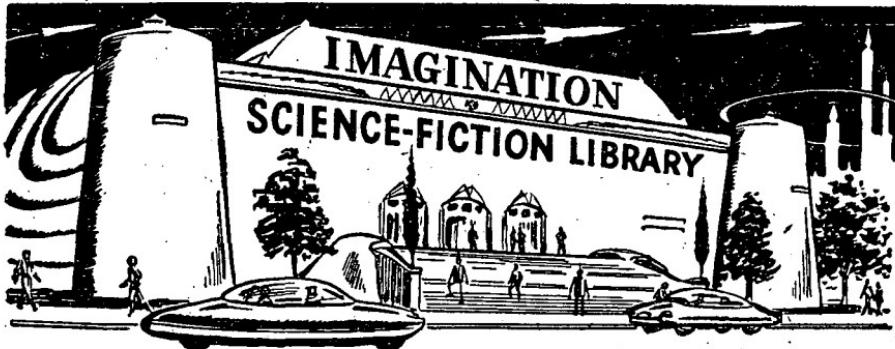
\* \* \*

That's all for this time . . . Remember, if you have a fanzine you want reviewed, send it to me, Mari Wolf, *Fandora's Box*, IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Illinois. And don't forget Cleveland over Labor Day.

—Mari Wolf



"Seems harmless enough!"



## — REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

*Conducted by Henry Bott*

**Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review one or more — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.**

### TIMELINER

by Charles Eric Maine, 249 pages, \$2.75, Rinehart & Company, Inc, New York, N. Y.

A faithless wife throws Dr. Hugh Macklin into a series of time-travelling jumps with the close of a switch. From this trite beginning, a familiar but still fascinating novel takes form.

A lively imagination is shown by this facile English author, not in the choice of plot, but in the development of his ideas of the future. An appealing style, excellent characterization, and not unreasonable technical mumbo-jumbo, make for an all-around good story.

You won't fire off rockets with this one—but then you won't half-finish it either.

The book has a minor failing—but one of which I am too conscious in most science-fiction I read. Why is it not possible to invent, select, or otherwise originate proper nouns which have some air of realism? It seems to me that I am forever encountering "Gug" or "Brzfmek" or "Neronium" or other things and persons too outrageously "unliteral" to believe in. I realize that an unfamiliar world has unfamiliar things and these require differentiating names—but some writers do this so subtly and yet so realistically that I never question them even if I am aware at all of their existence. I plead, therefore, name your characters and things, Gentlemen, but make me believe them!

# L etters

## from the R eaders

### SPACE MYSTERY . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Thought I might as well avail myself of the inalienable right my recent 35c purchase bought me and send in my comments on the April issue of Madge.

Well, quiet again reigns in s-f fandom; the Asimov-Bott feud didn't come off afterall. I was blood-thirstily awaiting a no-holds-barred battle!

Cover: I repeat my comment of last month: Boy!

Stories: All good this time. To be more specific:

HUNTING LICENSE really had no plot, but so effectively evoked emotion and maintained interest that I didn't miss the rather intricate plot I usually demand in novelettes . . . McConnell's auto-biographical sketch was exceptional; seems that s-f writers can write about the fantastic more gracefully and convincingly than they can tell their own life-stories, yet McConnell's piece was almost as good as his story!

A MATTER OF ETHICS, cute, and readable.

ALBATROSS, this story would make an excellent TV play—was good reading too.

Which brings me to THE VOYAGE OF VANISHING MEN. I can't figure this one. I enjoyed it while reading it, but afterwards I began to wonder about it. It's really not s-f since the vanishings didn't have any scientific explanation, giving the whole story a sort of supernatural tone. I had expected some explanation based on Einstein's curved universe theory which mentions the possibility that some stars we see in very distant space are actually nearer ones seen in two places because of the curvature of space . . . I had wondered what would happen if we headed for one of those stars . . . would we return to our own solar system . . . and if we did would we be "turned inside-out"? . . . But since Mullen's story wasn't about that, I'll drop the subject, except to say that I'm not sure whether the story was good or bad . . . what do you say?

## IMAGINATION

To the space-stationists: government sources report great progress in the space station development field. I understand they already have the hole up there to build the space-doughnut around!

. . . Incidentally, when the space station is built it will mean the folding up of many s-f magazines. With the real thing available the fans will turn to a new type of magazine, like "Science Newsletter"!

Did you actually change *Madge's* editorial policy? If not, what brought about the sudden upsweep in *Madge* fiction?

Victor Paananen  
1148 W. 8th St.  
Ashtabula, Ohio

*Stan Mullen's story purposely omitted a scientifically "plausible" ending, pointing up instead the equally plausible fact that when man ventures into space he may well experience things for which he can provide no "logical" explanation. Afterall, space is the doorway to infinity, and while knowledge may await man in its incredible vastness—it may take some doing to ferret it out! In the meantime astounding things may happen—to man, which point Mullen stressed. Yep, we think it was a fine stf yarn. Real food for thought . . . A space station will mean the end of stf mags? Heck, man, it will be the real beginning of our popularity on a mass-appeal scale. Wait and see! . . . Nope, we haven't changed our editorial policy—it's still one, of endeavoring to bring you the best of science fiction entertainment. If we slip once in awhile we apologize. Anyway, thanks for saying *Madge* is improving.*

*We'll try to keep it that way! . . . wh*

## MORE BOOK REVIEWS . . .

Dear Bill Hamling:

Just one thought I'd like to extend after my perusal of the April issue of *Madge*.

a. Henry Bott has established his competence and fairness as a book reviewer, even to one of the authors whose work he had panned.

b. Henry Bott had one-half a page devoted to one book review in the issue—while seven and a half pages were devoted to reviews of fanzines.

c. The foregoing strikes me as being out of proportion considering the people who read fanzines and those who read hard cover books. This is no reflection on Mari Wolf or her FANDORA'S BOX column. I simply believe that Henry Bott should at least have as much space in each issue!

d. Keep up the good work on the rest of the magazine!

William Boermann  
308 E. Madison St.  
Ann Arbor, Mich.

*Reason for the smaller book review space is quite simple, Bill. These days there seems to be less activity in the hard-cover field; there just are not that many new books published each month to give Hank Bott's column the space you suggest. If book publishing activity picks up we'll enlarge the department . . . . . wh*

## NO-FAN'S LAND!

Dear Bill:

This is my first letter to *Madge*, although I've been a steady reader

for some time.

Re the April issue: James V. McConnell can usually turn out a good story, and his HUNTING LICENSE is no exception. A very good plot, and ditto writing. As for George O. Smith's serial, HIGHWAYS IN HIDING, well, it's by Smith, and that's good enough for me!

I like the McCauley cover pin-ups. I've been a "Mac-Girl" fan ever since the old *Fantastic Adventures* days. Terry is good too, but where, oh where are those Malcolm Smith photo-covers? They have been one of *Madge's* highlights.

FANDORA'S BOX was good, as usual. And I have a few words to say about the Asimov-Bott feud; I was considerably letdown by Isaac's letter in the April issue editorial. Sure, it's Bott's privilege as a reviewer to flay a writer if he wants to. And brother, did he do that to Asimov! But, the author has a right to be indignant, too. I admit that if I had been Asimov I would have written Bott personally instead of griping publicly, but as long as he did it . . .

Why don't you get some other interior artists beside Terry and McCauley? They're good, but a little more variety would be too.

In spite of your enthusiasm, I can't place *Madge* near the top on consistent good fiction; however, the covers, and departments, raise it up in the top five bracket for me.

Anybody care to correspond with a fan in no-fan land?

Barry Gardner  
Box 201  
Deport, Texas

*The Smith photo-covers are slow in appearing because Malcolm is*

*slow in producing them! We'll get after him pronto! Glad you like the "Mac Girl" covers, and hope you—along with other readers—approve of the Terry change-of-pace cover on this issue . . . . . wh*

### MORBID STORY . . .

Dear Bill:

You asked for opinions on the April issue cover. I like the idea—if the "new look" is used sparingly. I find now that your covers are looking more and more similar. I respectfully suggest, therefore, that you intersperse McCauley's work with others.

Now the stories. HUNTING LICENSE is the most disgusting story I have read in a long time. It is crammed full of morbid statements. Witness:

*"She doesn't really object to the sight of naked bodies lashed to the front fenders of your car, does she?"*

*"I wonder what's wrong with things nowadays that there just aren't enough criminals."*

*"The body (human) was so big that Thompson had it skinned and tanned, and made a really nice-looking rug out of it."*

Now there are just a few examples of morbidity I found. Anyone who can write like that ought to be incarcerated where his dangerous tendencies can be watched. If the stf field were to be judged by that one story, it would indeed be true that we are maniacs.

And then we come to A MATTER OF ETHICS by Russ Winterbotham; I would suggest that in the future you take all similar stories and deposit them gently but

## IMAGINATION

firmly in the water closet. It was, to my way of thinking, an attempt at humor à la Thorne Smith that failed.

But, of course, there was something to recommend the issue. Such was THE VOYAGE OF VANISHING MEN by Stanley Mullen. I don't quite know what it was, but that story had something. Something very entertaining. I suggest that you get Mullen to write more for *Madge*.

HIGHWAYS IN HIDING was still good, although Part II didn't match up to the first instalment.

Jeremy Millett  
1446 Garden St.  
Park Ridge, Ill.

*When you quote a passage out of context to the whole it quite often takes on an exaggerated emotional aspect. The McConnell story, while definitely not a sweetness-and-light type, did extrapolate on a possible future social development. Not exactly one we'd like to see come to pass—but then, science fiction, if it be true to itself, should encompass anything in the realm of possibility—at the same time not necessarily making it (or them) a probability. With this thought in mind we feel your opinion is in somewhat of an extreme; the story was down-beat—and somewhat disturbing—but not disgusting! How did HIGHWAYS stack up with you in the concluding parts? . . . wlh*

#### NEWSSTAND MYSTERY . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Once upon a time, way back in the Spring of '52, I realized that *Madge's* distribution was as poor as could be in this area. So, in a

fit of wanting to read one of my favorite mags regularly, I subscribed.

Now, just as soon as I had subbed, a strange thing happened. Every month, promptly, *Madge's* little elfish eyes peered at me from my local newsstand. Time passed, and *Madge* was on sale every month here. Now, in the due process of issues, my subscription ran out. I didn't renew, having other uses for the mass sum of three bucks, and anyway, I can always pick up each issue at the stands.

Yet now, another strange thing happened. Too coincidentally, *Madge* stopped appearing at my local news-dealer. It just wasn't to be found. This mysterious business makes me wonder. Do you have some secret method devised so that when a subscription expires a subscriber has to renew in order to get the magazine? Anyway, please say something to the boys who distribute *Madge*. Tell them Trenton, Tennessee is still on the map—but that they don't act like it!

. . . After reading Sam Moskowitz's letter, and your answer, about five times, I find that somebody is mixed up. Admitting this much to Sam, that his anthology was good—if somewhat spotty—but if the publisher, McBride, did select one story for rubber stamp approval, after deciding that your selection couldn't be used, they did wrong. I cannot see why they couldn't have used the original selection of Wolheim since both he and Sam were simply compilers of "editors' choices".

This little stir about Asimov and Bott . . . Well, it also leaves me wondering. Asimov had little room

to hit back at Bott, but Bott hardly gave the book—even a poor review. He merely stated that Asimov cannot write, and that the stories (to him) are utter nonsense. In the first place, Asimov's *SECOND FOUNDATION* was a good book—to me. Using a more or less strict background, he has written some very interesting stories about the far future. Bott tore out at this. He said that the stories were nothing because they deal with big happenings, on a very large time scale. This is true. But comparing Asimov, unfavorably at that, with Doc Smith's dull night-mares, is like comparing a rose with dirt. Of course I'm biased in Asimov's favor—not for hitting back as he did, but because Bott did not give him a very good review. As a general rule I like Bott's reviews. But in the Asimov case he rubbed me the wrong way.

I like the serial, *HIGHWAYS IN HIDING*. Can't wait until I finish it!

James Lewis  
Rt. No. 4  
Trenton, Tenn.

*Your newsstand mystery is not one of our doings, Jim. Madge is distributed by THE AMERICAN NEWS COMPANY which has several hundred branches throughout the country. Since Trenton is not one of the cities with a branch office copies would be "farmed out" from the nearest city maintaining a branch. In your case the closest branch would be Jackson, Tenn. Apparently the Jackson branch has had more local demand and as a result the farm-out was curtailed. However, a situation like this is important from our standpoint; we*

*don't like to see you—or other readers—disappointed. And since a customer's voice is always the loudest, why not drop our distributor a card and register a complaint. You'll probably get fast action on future issues that way! And if any other reader has a similar problem, please let us know about it*

• • • • • wlh

### GRAND "SLAM"!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Since I am sure you as an editor are interested in seeing your circulation grow, you may be interested in the reactions of a fairly new science fiction reader to your publication.

First of all, I think your covers are blah. The idea behind the March cover, for example, was good, but wherever did the majority of s-f illustrators get the idea that all s-f readers are male? The type of female figure used would be much more at home on a calendar hung in a barbershop!

Your choice of stories is among the best, in my opinion, but I would enjoy seeing an extra one to replace both *FANDORA'S BOX* and the letter column. I'm not even slightly interested in your choice of half-baked contributors. I buy *IMAGINATION* to read something by professionals, not to read other readers' (or so-called fans) opinions. I can form my own.

I would like to see only short stories, and short novels complete in one issue. If I want a full-length novel I'll buy a book; when I buy a magazine I expect short stories.

There is no reason why the average person shouldn't enjoy stf. But

## IMAGINATION

most of them will never have a chance to find out as long as s-f magazines are buried in the far corner of the magazine stand with horror and similar trash hiding them.

Something which I thought was a pitiful waste of space was your printing a personal disagreement with Mr. Moskowitz, and that between Asimov and Bott. So what! No one expects a critic to be well-liked by an author! Why waste space?

After all the "slams" I still enjoy *Madge* and I think science fiction is continually improving. But please remember that many of us enjoy reading s-f, without becoming avid fans.

I hope this finds its way into your file, not in *Madge*, stealing space from something much more interesting.

Joan Menagh  
556 Gresham Ave.  
Sunnyvale, Calif.

*Speaking of female figures—how about the covers on recent issues? Like them better? . . . Your comment on stf magazines being hidden at some newsstands is a sore point with all editors in the field. Frankly, that's a situation beyond our control—we just can't visit the thousands of newsstands in the*

*country! But it can be solved. If you—and every other reader of science fiction—will simply pick up whatever science fiction magazines your dealers sell and put them OUT IN FRONT on the racks we'll have a real chance to broaden the field. Afterall, we (all of us) don't want science fiction hidden from the general public. So do us—and yourself—a favor the next time you visit your newsstand or drug store—and every time for that matter!—make sure science fiction magazines are OUT FRONT by putting them there. Local newsdealers simply don't take the time or interest in properly displaying science fiction, so it's up to us as readers to do the job. Speaking for the staff of IMAGINATION, we'll bless you for your efforts in behalf of the field! . . . File your letter, Joan? We found it very interesting indeed. See? This is what a letter section is for. . . . . wlh*

#### "CRAZY" DISCOVERY!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have been reading science fiction for almost two years, but it was only two or three months ago that I discovered IMAGINATION and have been "crazy" over it ever since!

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Compared to other science fiction magazines (others come up with good stories, but never as many as yours) IMAGINATION tops all!

As for the April issue, I enjoyed all the stories, especially the serial HIGHWAYS IN HIDING. I am waiting impatiently for the next instalment. Incidentally, while I thought HUNTING LICENSE to be a little odd, it was certainly good. And A MATTER OF ETHICS is one of the most delightful stories I have ever read.

Paul Kagan

5116 Woodlawn Ave.  
Chicago 15, Ill.

*Reading science fiction for two years and just discovered Madge? Man, what you've been missing! Welcome into the fold . . . wlh*

### ON SECOND THOUGHT . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Re your April issue, I particularly enjoyed Mack Reynolds' ALBATROSS, and Winterbotham's A MATTER OF ETHICS. But McConnell's sadistic little piece, HUNTING LICENSE, was just about enough to make me swear off *Madge*. This is science fiction? You're sure the author's human?

However, having an open mind I went back and reviewed those wonderful cartoons. Hooray for Luther Scheffy—guess I won't swear off *Madge* afterall!

Betty D. Meyer

RFD No. 1 Holgate, Ohio

Hooray for your afterthought!  
wlh

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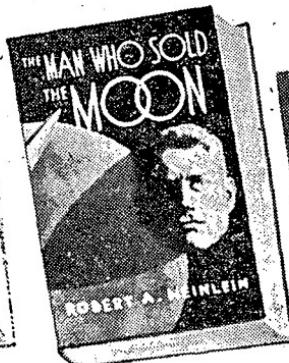
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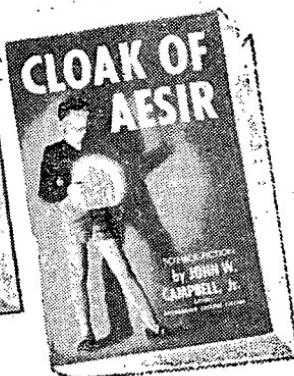
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